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THE JEWEL OF THEIR SOULS

SUSAN TABER

fiction (novel)

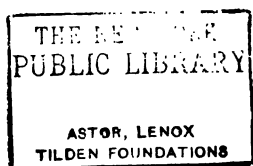


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THE JEWEL OF THEIR SOULS

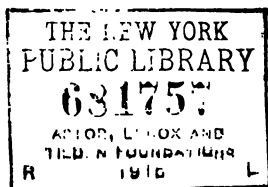
BY

SUSAN TABER

Author of "Country Neighbors: a Long Island
Pastoral," "Unexpected Affinities."



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THE JEWEL OF THEIR SOULS

*"Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls:
Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something,
nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands.
But he that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed."*

SHAKESPEARE—"Othello."

THE JEWEL OF THEIR SOULS

CHAPTER I

"I guess 'twas frightful there to see
A lady richly clad as she—
Beautiful exceedingly."

COLERIDGE—"Christabel."

"SO you like it here, Mother?"

"Yes, very much; that is, fairly; that is, as much as I like any summer place," said Mrs. Coffin, conscientiously defining her attitude towards the Catskill boarding house, and settling herself, in her rocking chair on the piazza, with contentment showing in every line of her compact little figure.

That she was from New York could be seen at a glance. What denoted it, would be difficult to define; and yet had one met her by starlight in the Desert of Sahara, the impression of her nationality would have obtruded itself just as plainly as now upon the thoughtful observer. He perhaps, were he very observing, might have gone even farther and settled in his own mind exactly to what society and locality of the city she belonged; divining her high-class English and Dutch ancestry, and their residence—perhaps in Washington Square, or Irving Place—with

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its portraits and old mahogany; its fine china and good cheer; and its neatness and restrained sobriety.

He would have noticed her thin lips and curling nostrils and slim erect figure; and argued from them an impeccable reputation, high religious standing and Puritan upbringing; combining a thorough satisfaction with her position in this world, with an equal conviction of its continuance in the world to come. He might have noticed a certain Pharisaic attitude toward any one born outside her favoured class and city, barely concealed under a veneer of old-time courtesy, thin and polished as steel and as impervious to all exterior impressions— Yes, Mrs. Coffin was not only from New York, she *was* old-time New York itself, looking at you, speaking to you, and more than all judging you, by one infallible, inflexible standard.

Was the man opposite her taking account of these things in true filial fashion, and criticising while he watched her? That was what Walter Coffin's best friends had never been able to tell. His attitude toward her, however, might be summed up in a few words. She was his mother; she was good to him; and he accepted her as he did other inevitable things, with contentment.

"Yes, I like it as well as most summer places," she said again with a smile, settling her bonnet carefully upon her front hair; just such a bonnet and just such a front as represented New York middle-aged gentility for so many years and now, alas, represent it no longer!

"Of course there is very little to do; and the peo-

ple are rather impossible and the food is poor; but what can one expect in these wilds; and fortunately I need not stay in them long!"

"So the people are impossible, are they, poor little Mother?" he said sympathetically. "How lonely you must be!"

"Well, of course, Walter, I make the best of such things always. As my grandmother used to say, it is our Christian duty to be condescending towards people without our advantages, and set them an example of courtesy. So I have tried to accommodate myself and really some of them are far from unpleasant. There is an old German professor and his wife, who, though foreigners, have an interesting knowledge of people and places on the other side; and a Southern lady who of course cannot help it, poor thing, that her husband was a rebel and killed at Bull Run, which accounts I suppose for her unaccountable way of looking at life. And then," rather mysteriously, "there is a girl."

"Oh! is there?" he asked, with some interest.

"Yes; really, Walter, I should be glad of your opinion about her. I must say I have seen nothing so far amiss, though I have watched most carefully, and of course being an artist and her associates such as they must be, little should be expected of her in the way of manners!—but still, Walter, I want your opinion. I do not like to think of her as not being respectable; but—"

"Indeed, Mother, I should hardly think there was much opportunity for her to be otherwise;—here where every one I have seen looked over sixty."

"Oh! she is under thirty, I am sure. I sounded her, and I think, I am pretty positive—from something she said,—that she is not over twenty-seven."

"'Twenty-seven is not very old,' " quoted Walter from the then popular Bab Ballads.

"Nor is it very young either, my son. However, at dinner to-day you shall judge for yourself; for you know they have mid-day dinner," she concluded with a sigh.

"So I suppose, and as I expect to do full justice to it after my drive, I will go and get ready," answered Walter, and he left her.

It is some years since the events in which he was concerned took place; motors were uncommon then and the privilege of the few, rather than the property of the many; airships had not yet appeared on the scene; telephones and electric lights were not in every hotel; nor trolleys on every road, nor bathrooms in every farm house. Apartment houses were rarer and multi-millionaires fewer and in better repute. Even the new woman had not yet risen above the horizon; but hung upon it, a dim shadowy orbit, barely distinguishable amid the encircling gloom. In short it was the end of the nineteenth, instead of the beginning of the twentieth century.

Walter Coffin's father had been an Englishman, a distinguished naval officer, belonging to an old Devon family, noted for its devotion to the service. He had met his wife, during a short stay in this country, some thirty years before, and had wooed and married her in as many days. It had been love at first sight for her as for him, and had continued so—at least on

her part—until the end. Mrs. Coffin had cheerfully followed her husband about the world, whenever possible, and during the years he spent at sea, had returned for the time to her own family. She was equally devoted to them, as to her country, and would gladly have made an American of Walter, had not her husband interfered. Walter, by his wish, was educated at Cambridge; and later studied civil engineering, for which he showed great aptitude; preferring it to his father's profession as offering a greater chance of adventure and preferment. He gained both for a time in South Africa; but after his father's sudden death some years later, he returned here to be near his mother, obtaining a position as engineer on a bridge about to be constructed on the east side of the Hudson, not far from where Mrs. Coffin was staying, and there he had now joined her, to spend Sunday.

In person, Walter was like hundreds of other young Englishmen, tall, erect and well built, with that look of distinction which is seen in them so often, and which may mean much or little, according as it is due to their mind or their tailor; in features he had something of his father's blonde impassiveness, under an impenetrable mask of either conventional-ity or reserve; in character he was more complex, partaking as he did of both father and mother, and yet with an individuality all his own.

"I have inherited every fault there is on both sides," he had been wont to say, "all which, in ordinary cases, would be divided among half a dozen children, as an only son has descended to me."

Nevertheless he took these faults as cheerfully, as he did his parentage and surroundings, considering that they belonged to that class of immutable things, with which as a plain Englishman he need not concern himself.

A little later as he and his mother entered the dining-room of the little boarding house, which she found so pleasantly unendurable, a girl passed them, with a bow and a smile to Mrs. Coffin; then, glancing farther, she suddenly stopped short and held out her hand exclaiming:

"Why, Walter Coffin!"

"Jeannie!" he cried. Then as the identity of the young lady with Mrs. Coffin's description began to dawn on him: "Is it really you that I have been hearing about from my mother?" and he turned to the latter for confirmation of his words; but she had already passed on. Jeannie looked after her with raised eyebrows.

"Very likely, I know her—a little against her will, I expect—but I must not keep you now. Stop and speak to me a moment when you come out," and she was gone, and Walter joined Mrs. Coffin who was fairly bubbling over with curiosity.

"Walter, you know her! You called her by her first name. What does it mean?" she cried, between excitement and indignation; excitement at a mystery; indignation that it should have been kept from her. Walter smiled, serenely oblivious to both.

"Yes, I knew her in Paris, where she was studying painting," he said quietly. "That is five years ago and I have not seen her since."

"And you are sure she is respectable?" she asked, returning to her old grievance.

"Mother, more so than you are!" he replied with his slow smile. "Do not look so horror-struck; what I mean is that you are born so, while she has had to fight for it. Oh! yes, indeed, I will answer for Jeannie's respectability. I can answer for other things about her, too, poor little soul!"

"What things, dear?"

Walter hesitated to put into words his feelings about Jeannie, saying merely:

"Oh! well, she seemed unhappy and had no one to take care of her!"

"Really, poor girl; but then she would always find some man ready to do that, I have no doubt! Where were all her parents and guardians to let her go alone to that dreadful city?"

"She is an orphan, I believe, from some little town in the northern part of the state, and went there to study. She had talent, I was told."

"Yes, I have seen her things; quite pleasing I thought, and so is she; I rather like her; but her clothes! Really, Walter, she came down one night in a robe—I suppose she would call it a tea-gown—that was fit only for a harem! Why, if your Aunt Mary had seen her, I positively tremble to think what she might have said."

"Jeannie would not care, Mother; I never can make you understand her sort. They are a law to themselves and the opinion of what you call society is nothing to them."

"No, how strange; but what can you expect of an

artist who studies in Paris! Now I am broad-minded myself, from having seen so much of the world, and I make allowance for people like that. Your poor father used to say they had artistic natures!"

"That is what they claim."

"And I find an artistic nature generally means a dislike for doing anything unpleasant," continued Mrs. Coffin with unconscious humour; "but fortunately we are not often cursed with it in our family. How did it happen, Walter, that you were so intimate with this girl and never mentioned her?" she added with returning suspiciousness.

"Why, Mother, I do not suppose it occurred to me. She belonged to our set in Paris; Arthur Hinsdale knew her well."

Mrs. Coffin looked relieved.

"I should think she might just suit Arthur, who is another artistic nature, though how he came by it I cannot conceive."

"No, your family do not run very much that way, do they?" Walter answered, examining her gravely. "However, Arthur has it all right. Have you seen his last book of verse?"

"Oh, dear, another! I hoped he had quite given that up."

"It is an innocent amusement, and less injurious than drinking or gambling," Walter said deprecatingly.

"Do not talk so absurdly; what have they to do with writing poetry? And yet even that is better than his social ideas. I cannot see where he gets

them; and it is sad to see one of our family so foolish, even if he is only a distant cousin."

"Sad indeed," he assented, smiling, "but we cannot all be as practical as you are, Mother; some of us must sow our wild oats in this way!"

"I will say for you, Walter, that you do not sow yours as foolishly, and you are like your poor dear father in this. I always told him that he worked off his wild spirits in dangerous games, instead of in silly talk as our boys here do," and Mrs. Coffin glanced approvingly at her son.

"Oh! we all make fools of ourselves in one way or another," Walter answered cheerfully, "so the manner does not matter very much. You have finished," as she rose. "I am stopping to speak to Jeannie for a moment, and will join you later in your room if I may!"

Jeannie was on the piazza and looked up with a smile as he approached her. She was like her smile, soft, gentle and sweet; there were no angles about her anywhere. She was all curves; from the long nape of her neck to her little pointed chin; from her finely arched eyebrows to the delicate bow of her mouth; even to the slight stoop of her slender figure; there were no straight lines anywhere. Her beauty was one entirely of form, not of coloring;—in that it was essentially American—so that even the strong sensual appeal which she made had in it a mental element; the charm of perfect tact and pliability. She was never still; her restless little figure was almost always in motion, and when she spoke, she used her hands almost as much as she

did her lips; and yet this excessive nervousness which might, in another person have affected one unpleasantly was, in her, so blended with her personality that it took on almost the same unique character. She began eagerly:

"It seems the strangest thing our meeting here, Walter, of all improbable places, and after all these years! Do tell me how you have been and what you have done?"

He examined her for a moment before answering, in a formal way he had in which his face seemed to become as expressionless as his manner.

"I am always well and I have been almost everything from an explorer and engineer to a miner and cowboy."

"You went to South Africa after you left us?" inquired Jeannie, still apparently unconscious of his glance.

"Yes, and I had quite a jolly time there; got a fine job from one of the railroads; and then joined an exploring expedition after big game; had a small skirmish with the Boers; worked for a bit in opening up a mine, and came off with a share of the spoils; then finally, as I felt a bit seedy, and my mother was alone, and needed me, I came here. I was lucky in getting employment almost immediately, and here I am! Now for yourself."

"Wait a moment, Walter," interrupted Jeannie, who had listened to this rather jerky account with much interest. "Why have you done all this, for adventure, for money, or to see the world?"

Walter reflected.

"Perhaps a little of all three," he answered. "I hate monotony and I like to take part in things; also I want to succeed. So I religiously divide everything I make into three parts: one I send to my mother; the other I invest and the third I blow in. I have made my living, put by something, and had some fun; what more can a man want!"

Jeannie ruminated; looking at him from under lowered lids as she replied:

"You are a queer fellow, Walter, but I suppose it is the English in you; to me it does not seem fun at all."

"Probably not," he said drily. "Now let us hear about you."

Jeannie shrugged her shoulders, and spread out her hands with a careless gesture, as though disavowing responsibility for her acts. They were firm, rather large hands, and her smooth fingers were squared at the tips in a manner that showed more constructive ability than, at a first glance, one would have been led to expect.

"Oh, my story is not as interesting as yours!" she said, with her half ironic, half appealing glance. "I got a portrait in the Salon; and got orders from it, and saved up enough to come back to New York; and I have managed to pull through somehow, in this great rich city. I have a tiny apartment and Arthur has introduced me to a lot of people—we do not have half a bad time—and I am trying to save up enough money to go abroad again and perhaps some day live there. In the meantime, I enjoy myself while I can."

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"Is that why you are here?" asked Walter with a formal smile and observing eyes.

"I am here because it is cheap," replied Jeannie calmly, "and I wanted just such a place in which to paint a pot boiler. It is a decorative piece, an order, and rather stupid; but one must live, you know!—and later I look for glory."

She glanced up again at this, as though appealing to him for the glory that was to come, and Walter would have been quite ready to bestow it; her success among the Philistines was always assured. Now that he looked at her more closely, however, he was hardly inclined to wonder that Mrs. Coffin had felt puzzled; for everything about Jeannie seemed so incongruous with everything else. She looked so helpless and yet so calmly self-assured; her low voice had such a little hard ring, and her manner was at once so lazy and yet so restless, as though her limbs were strung on quivering wires.

"You spoke of Arthur," he said at length. "I thought him looking fagged. Is that due to you?"

She laughed a little uneasily. "To me? Oh, no! It is his old grievance against the world; it has either injured him, or some one else, and should be forced to make restitution! And then when it does not, he is upset."

"It is generally over some one else's troubles," answered Walter with prompt loyalty, "he bears his own well."

Jeannie smiled archly. "Hum—to you, perhaps, for you are a man, but from a woman Arthur requires tons of sympathy; and has worn mine almost

threadbare. As I tell him, there always has been injustice and there always will be; but he gets as excited over it, as if it happened for the first time."

"Poor old fellow!" said his cousin again. "If it was for himself now, I should not feel surprised; the world has always treated him a bit shabbily; he deserves the best and has had the worst that it can give!"

"Hum!" answered Jeannie again, "the world is a poor place; but as it is the only one we have, we might as well enjoy it, instead of tilting at it, like Don Quixote, as Arthur does. My way is far better."

"And what is your way, Jeannie?"

She curled herself further into her chair in a sinuous fashion she had, reminding one of a kitten just about to purr.

"I pet it a bit, and then it generally gives me what I want," she answered.

"And when it does not?" Walter asked.

Jeannie closed her eyes languidly.

"Oh! then I pet it a little more and in the end I generally get what I want. My wishes are so very simple and moderate that it would hardly pay to deny me."

"I am sure if they depended on me they would be satisfied every time," Walter said as he rose reluctantly, "but now I shall have to leave you, I am sorry to say. Shall we see you this evening?"

Jeannie looked up at him dubiously.

"There is really nothing to prevent your seeing me that I know; it is a small place and we are all

under each others' feet most of the time; but, Walter—"

"Yes."

She twisted her body into the chair, in a manner more than ever like the kitten as she answered. "I do not think your mother approves of me."

"Why should you say that?" Walter asked hastily.

Jeannie made a wry face. "I hardly know; an instinct perhaps, such as a dog may have. She probably does not think that I move in the highest circles, which is quite true."

Walter made a deprecating gesture. "Nonsense, my mother is old-fashioned but kind; you see she does not understand the modern woman—"

Jeannie looked up at him archly.

"Am I very modern?" she asked.

"I should say that you were," Walter answered, "and I am going to appeal to my mother's pity for you on that score if you will take it in good part."

Jeannie straightened herself and looked at him gratefully. "Oh! I take it all right. I am not particular where the interest comes from—if it is there. Well, good-bye till this evening."

She nodded and he left her to join Mrs. Coffin, saying as he did so:

"I wish, Mother, that you would be a little kind to that girl; she needs it, for she has had a hard life, and few advantages; and the advice of a woman like you would be invaluable to her."

"Indeed, Walter, I shall be glad to do what I can," answered Mrs. Coffin, rising instantly to this appeal, as he had known she would, for she was as kind at

heart as she was unkind in speech, and always quite ready to befriend the people she disapproved, "and you say justly that my advice will be of assistance to her if she will take it."

"You may be sure she will," he commented with a reliance on Jeannie's tact.

So it happened that evening, that Mrs. Coffin very pleasantly invited her to join them on the piazza, and was both condescending and agreeable, to her son's satisfaction, and the other's surprised amusement. She was quite as ready to make friends as was Mrs. Coffin, for Jeannie was a friendly little soul, especially to those who could be of service to her; and she was quick to realize the advantage of such a friendship. It may seem strange that Walter's mother should have had no fear of its effect upon him; but she would no more have thought of the possibility of anything serious between her son and Jeannie than had he been Prince of Wales and the latter her lady in waiting. It was Mrs. Coffin's belief that when Walter was prepared to marry he would do so, in every way suitably, and in the meantime she hardly gave the matter a thought. By the time of his departure on Monday, she had grown so interested in her plans for Jeannie's improvement that she forgot to feel as badly as she otherwise would have done, and he went away well pleased, first that he had given his mother a companion and second that he had gained for Jeannie a friend.

The boarding house, where they were stopping, had a popularity due to economy and good air. It was situated on the top of one hill and underneath an-

other, in a particularly inaccessible part of these inaccessible mountains. It was very hot there in the day time, and very damp at night, and the tops of the hills were generally concealed beneath an impenetrable mist. The roads were dusty and poor, making driving and walking alike difficult, and there was no golf, as now, to give the much needed exercise and recreation. Hence the boarders were thrown upon each other's society for lack of other means of occupation. Jeannie of course had her painting, and Mrs. Coffin was always busy as a bee, writing letters, making up her clothes for next winter, reading, and above all talking, so that she hardly deserved the pity her son in his own mind bestowed upon her, when he left on Monday. He had to drive six miles, over an impossible road, in a shaky buckboard, in order to reach the ferry at Catskill, and was obliged to start very early having still a third journey before him, and this time on the train, before reaching his destination—the village of Erncliffe.

Walter had been very fortunate in obtaining his present post of engineer—on the bridge about to be built there—against great competition and much to every one's surprise, and owed it indirectly to the influence of Charles Sherwood, the well known railway financier.

"I am very much afraid," Arthur Hinsdale had said to him on the day of his application, "that they will turn you down. You are far too well dressed."

Walter stared.

"I have had this suit three years," he answered.

"But it was made in London."

"Of course."

"And it has been carefully pressed."

"Naturally."

"Then it cannot fail to give you that well groomed look, instead of the baggy one that they like. While as to that cravat!"

"Now there I have you, Arthur. I bought that at Sterns' for fifty cents."

"It was fifty cents too much then, for it makes you look sporty. Or is it that it is too well tied?"

"Have done," said his cousin impatiently, "if your big men are such asses as not to distinguish between a man, and his cravat, I have no further use for them."

"You may find they have none for you!" retorted Arthur; but it seemed that in this instance he was mistaken, for Charles Sherwood happened to be present at the interview, and Charles Sherwood was a man who prided himself on being well informed in all matters even remotely connected with his business. He knew a great deal of what went on in the engineering world, and having a correspondent in South Africa, was by no means unacquainted with Walter's name and exploits there; and proved himself perfectly capable of distinguishing between a man and his cravat.

"That fellow has brains," was his brief comment after Walter's departure, "and he has had a good record. I know something of him," and as usual his opinion decided the matter and Walter was preferred to other applicants. He had never seen Mr. Sherwood since and at times he speculated a little upon

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the chance which had thus thrown them together.

Walter's account to Jeannie of his life and adventures, though brief, summarized very fairly his principles of action. He had inherited from his father a love of adventure and a mechanical genius which craved expression almost like a talent for music; but with it he combined his mother's own shrewd practical spirit; the trading spirit, of many an old Dutch and English merchant. It was said that when Walter Coffin went in to an adventure, he was sure to come out, richer in money as well as in credit, and the division which he described himself as making of his small means, well represented the disposition of his mind, where reckless adventure, and careful saving, went hand in hand with filial devotion.

Walter saw himself, years hence, settled in his Devon home, with enough to support the life that he loved, and was determined one day to obtain. And he also saw himself there with a wife and children, whenever he felt able to afford them. At present he would have regarded them as useless appendages, tending to retard a man in both stages of his career, adventure and profit.

CHAPTER II

"Why, then, the world's mine oyster

Which I with sword will open."

SHAKESPEARE—"Merry Wives of Windsor."

THE little village of Ernclyff is situated on the right bank of the Hudson, just where the river makes a slight twist, and widens into the form of a lake, surrounded on one side by mountains and on the other by the heights upon which the place lies. At that time it was still untouched by the march of progress which has now converted its peaceful street into a noisy, hustling, bustling thoroughfare. The view, from the houses which lined it, surrounded by lofty trees and luxuriant shrubbery, was beautiful, though less extensive than that obtained on the heights above them, where were located a few country places and the estate of the Sherwood family.

Charles Sherwood, banker, railway magnate and multi-millionaire, had purchased it from the last of its former owners; the degenerate descendant of an old impoverished family. He had rebuilt the dilapidated house; restored the fine old grounds and spent thousands upon the roads, and public buildings of the neighbouring village. There was hardly an improvement of any kind in the vicinity, and they had been many since he came there, which was not due,

either directly or indirectly, to him; and yet the inhabitants still spoke of him as an interloper and looked at him with half-veiled hostility. Why it would be hard to say, unless we content ourselves with the trite reason, that he did not possess the magnetism to attract them. Or is it not rather that the common people, like some women and most dogs, know instantly who loves them, and that Mr. Sherwood did not. Be that as it may, even the latest and most needed of these improvements, the bridge crossing the viaduct and replacing the old dangerous surface crossing, which was due entirely to his influence in a railroad of which he was principal stockholder and director, did not gain him the gratitude which he certainly deserved and had a right to expect—but of this he was probably as unconscious as of the strong feeling which his good will had excited in the mind of his chief engineer.

Walter, on the afternoon of his return, determined to take advantage of the fine weather, and walk, from the scene of his labours, to the house where he boarded, alternately petted and bullied by his landlady, Mrs. Baker, who eked out a modest income by supplying her boarders, at a small cost, with good rooms, excellent food, and racy gossip. As he emerged on to the river road leading to the village, which had been lately converted by Mr. Sherwood's munificence from an oozy bog into a well built thoroughfare, he became aware that something unusual was taking place there. In the middle of the road stood an automobile and in front of it were ranged a lady, a little boy, and a small dog, all staring at

the car with an expression of amazed dismay, which was reflected on the face of the chauffeur at work on it.

"You seem in some difficulty. May I help you?" asked Walter, stepping forward.

"It won't go," said the little boy, pointing at the offending car, while the small dog barked in confirmation and the lady looked her appeal.

"Perhaps I may be able to start it. I am something of a machinist," answered Walter, joining the chauffeur, a stout, good-looking Irishman with a pleasant smile and a face showing a perfect lack of any mechanical ability. Walter's talents in this line were not put to the test, for he found the difficulty so slight as to require only a few moments' adjustment.

"I think it will work now," he said, stepping back to the lady. "Your man did not quite understand the trouble."

"Oh, he is a good deal of a fool!" she answered, speaking for the first time. "I keep him because he is a nice fellow and good to my little boy. I am sure we are very much obliged to you. We might have stayed here till midnight but for your assistance."

She spoke in a clear incisive voice which, though not loud, would never fail of making itself heard, and everything about her was like her voice, clear, alert, and commanding, from her strong well shaped figure to her finely chiselled features and firm vigorous carriage. Only her eyes slightly contradicted the rest of her face, but Walter was not then able to make out the meaning of their expression. He no-

ticed that she was dressed in the very plainest manner, and yet—Walter was not a connoisseur in ladies' clothes, but he had a suspicion that this plainness did not by any means imply lack of care; that it was not without intention that the folds of her white serge gown draped themselves in this way, and that the apparent simplicity of her rather mannish blouse and sailor hat were of a thoroughly costly nature.

The chauffeur at this instant coming forward to confirm the invitation given by the starting machine, the lady turned to Walter saying, as she entered the car:

"May I give you a lift? I am Mrs. Sherwood, and I am going to Ernclyff."

"Thank you, I shall be obliged if you will set me down in the village. I am Walter Coffin, and I am staying there."

She looked at him for a moment with interest before signing to him to get in, which he did,—following the small boy, still holding on tightly to the little dog,—and the car set off at a terrific rate of speed.

"Stop squeezing Toodles so, Bennie," said his mother. "You are choking the poor little beast."

"It is because I love him so, Mamma," he retorted with a pressure that made Toodles' eyes bulge.

"A truly masculine way of showing affection! So do I love you, but I do not strangle you to prove it. Excuse these interludes, Mr. Coffin. I think you said that was your name?"

Walter bowed, rather amused at her manner.

"I suppose you are one of the engineers employed on the bridge," continued Mrs. Sherwood in the same abrupt tone, which in her was neither ungracious nor awkward, but seemed to belong to her whole alert personality. "It must be amusing work."

"Hardly that; but it interests me and I make my living by it."

"That is what I meant, that it is pleasant to make your living in some way that is of use to other people. However I am no judge, for I probably could not make mine in any way," and as Walter knew nothing to adduce in contradiction to this statement, he was obliged to assent to it in silence. He felt some interest at being thus suddenly brought into contact with one of the Sherwood family, and regret that he was unable to sustain his part of the conversation more satisfactorily.

"You are an Englishman, are you not?" she continued.

Another assent.

"Then you probably play tennis. Come and see me any afternoon about four, if you have nothing better to do, we generally play then."

She gave the invitation with the air of a princess conferring a favour, and Walter accepted it, nothing loath, in the same spirit.

They soon reached the village at the speed they were going, and she turned to him again, making herself heard with difficulty above the jolting and noise of the car.

"Where shall I set you down?"

"Just here, please."

"Stop, Henry," she said to the chauffeur. "Try not to kill any more chickens than you can help, please. The last drive cost me a good deal. Thank you so much," this last to Walter, as he stood, hat in hand, prepared to take leave. "We are exceedingly indebted to your kindness. Good-bye." And she smiled at him as the car swept on, leaving him standing in the road staring after her.

"I didn't know as you knew Mrs. Jack," said a voice behind him, and turning Walter beheld his landlady, in all the glory of what she would have termed her Sunday-go-to-meetin' clothes.

"I do not," he answered, giving instantly the information which he foresaw would be extracted from him in the end. "I assisted her chauffeur in some trouble he had with the automobile and she was kind enough to give me a lift; that is all."

"I daresay," replied Mrs. Baker, leading the way to the house, "that chofleur of hers is a nice boy and from the village; but he couldn't drive a cow let alone one of them steam engines you call an anti-mobile. Why, the chickens he has killed alone would be enough to ruin 'em. 'Mrs. Sherwood,' says I, 'them chickens of mine has a sentimental as well as a commercial valie for I raised 'em myself.' 'You are quite right,' says she, 'and here's for the commercial and here's for the sentimental valie, and gives me a bill for each. Now if it had been Mrs. Corning and even Miss Elizabeth I might 'a whistled for my money, but I always said as Mrs. Jack was the best of the lot.'"

"Mrs. Jack? Is she then the wife of one of Mr. Sherwood's sons?"

"His only one, and a poor one at that, to my mind, and a bad bargain she got for all his money; and her a lady from here as could 'a had the pick of the place."

"So she is from here!" said Walter, seating himself on the piazza and lighting his pipe, preparatory to listening to the story she was evidently preparing to tell.

"Yes, her father, Professor Loring's folks, all come from here, and used to own all the land you see, which they mostly managed to make ducks and drakes of, I hear tell. Not that he did anything of the sort, for he took his foolishness out in other ways, hunting for birds and beasts and such things as them college folks sets store by. Many's the mornin' when I went out to walk I seen him setting up watching a bird as if he could whistle it off the tree. Stupid sort of freak, I say, but harmless; might better have been watching his daughter to my way of thinking! However, she growed up somehow and no thanks to him, and come out in New York with her aunt and married and no thanks to him either. And now she comes up sometimes to stay with Mr. Sherwood, and is the best of the lot to my mind."

"Is her father living now?" asked Walter, conscious of a much keener interest than he generally felt in his landlady's rambling talks.

"Oh, dear, no! he is dead and buried years ago, and the poor young lady is alone in the world, ex-

cept for her brother who doesn't compare to her, to my way of thinking."

"And the Sherwoods?"

"Oh! well, yes, the Sherwoods, every one knows what they are, of course. I won't say as the old man ain't been generous to the place, for 'twould be a lie. He has done a lot and in such a way as made you feel 'twas for his own sake 'stead of yours. And no thanks to any of his daughters I'll be bound, for we might go hang for all them. Mrs. Corning, the eldest and the most like him, is so took up with managing the world that she ain't got no time to be decent to the folks at her own door; and Mrs. Grey she cares for nobody on earth but her children, and I don't see as they're any great scratch when all's told. And then there's Miss Elizabeth, who keeps house for her father, and a mighty near housekeeper she is too, and gets her money's worth, I can tell you; no chance to turn an honest penny there. I won't say as she ain't kind, but it is kindness as sticks in your throat and makes you feel like shaking 'stead of thanking her."

"Mrs. Sherwood is attractive," said Walter, feeling it somehow incumbent on him to stem the flood of these reminiscences as being almost too intimate for his ears.

"Yes, she is," agreed Mrs. Baker, rising and beginning rapidly to divest herself of her bonnet and cloak preparatory to getting supper, "and I dunno why exactly, for she ain't so to speak as handsome and soft spoken as some; but she has a way with her as makes you smile, and that is a good deal in this

vale of tears," and with this dictum Walter felt disposed to agree.

In the meanwhile the subject of it had arrived at her father-in-law's house, and finding no one on the piazza had hurriedly entered the drawing-room, followed by Bennie with his pet still closely clasped in his arms. The room which she entered was large, imposing and uncomfortable, in the luxuriously stuffy style of that period. The windows as well as the walls were hung with the same deep green brocade, producing in spite of the lofty ceiling, a sense of indescribable oppression, which the curiously carved red cedar wood work intensified. Mrs. Sherwood struggled as usual against a strong impulse to throw open a window, without realising that the constraint which she experienced was not due to bad air.

"You are late, Isabel. I had given you up and sent away tea," said a lady with a plump figure and a careworn face, who was seated by the fire.

"I am sorry, Elizabeth, the car broke down as usual and delayed us some time."

"What, again?" asked another voice, and Charles Sherwood himself left the window and came towards her.

"Does it ever take you where you wish to go, Isabel?"

"Very rarely," she said, advancing to kiss him. "I did not know you were back, Mr. Sherwood."

"Yes, I came half an hour ago. Had you not better order tea, Elizabeth?"

"Impossible, Father, it upsets things if I send for it at this late hour."

"Never mind, I will get my maid to bring a cup to my room," said Isabel, a trifle wearily.

"I saw Jack," said Mr. Sherwood, detaining her, "and he said he might be up to-morrow. How are you, Bennie?" to his grandson, "and how is the beast?"

"Fine," answered Bennie with a loving hug.

"I wish, Bennie, you would not bring that dog in here. He may soil the carpet," commented Elizabeth.

"Go up to my room, Bennie, and wait for me there," said his mother, still patiently; then turning to Mr. Sherwood, "I met one of your engineers to-day, in fact he rendered me a service, for he appeared just as the automobile broke down and assisted in starting it; we might have been there yet but for him. He is an Englishman, named Walter Coffin, and I asked him to call and play tennis."

"You asked a man to call, knowing nothing of him but his name!" gasped Elizabeth.

"I knew he was a gentleman, and had been of service to me!" she replied with a quiet voice and flashing eyes. "I also knew he was a clever man, or Mr. Sherwood would not employ him."

"You judged correctly," here interposed Mr. Sherwood. "Walter Coffin is a fine engineer and his father a distinguished English officer; his mother, I believe, was a Miss Lancy," he added with an oblique glance at his daughter.

"Oh! well, yes! that alters the case; but you did not know this, Isabel, when you—"

"Allowed him to help me? No, I will ask another time."

"Of course I did not mean that. I have no objection to his helping you, but—"

"Never mind, Elizabeth," again interrupted Mr. Sherwood. "I can assure you that Walter Coffin's social position will quite warrant a game of tennis with Isabel."

He stood before the fire with his hands behind him, warming his coat tails in approved masculine fashion and looking monarch of all he surveyed and yet, —in his own house,—he was not. From men he expected, and generally received, implicit obedience or subdued subservience, but with women it was quite different. He had five sisters and three daughters, who shared his own arbitrary disposition, and being many as against one, had always proved too much for him. Elizabeth reigned supreme in his house, as her mother and elder sister had reigned before her, and governed in domestic matters with a despotic sway which even her father did not dispute. He was in fact as much a cipher here as it was possible for such a man to be, and his own servants would not have dreamed of obeying an order of his, as against one of Elizabeth's. He submitted meekly to a neatness he deemed unnecessary, a ceremony which was distasteful to him, and restrictions which he thought foolish, and rarely offered resistance except of a passive sort. On one point, however, he occasionally interfered. For his daughter-in-law Mr. Sherwood had a decided fellow feeling, first because she

was Bennie's mother—and he 'was devoted to his grandson—second, because she could see a joke, which none of his daughters could. Their father derived at times a quiet pleasure from laughing at them, and Isabel was always quite ready to bear him company.

In person Mr. Sherwood was spare and strong and well proportioned, with a clean shaven face and clearly cut features. The lips were thin and closed tightly and he rarely smiled, though his manners were uniformly courteous. His voice especially was pleasant and very low, and if he was not cordial neither was he arrogant, but treated every one alike with cold civility.

Charles Sherwood had been often styled a self-made man; but he was so only according to the sense of that ill-used term, that his success had been due to his own efforts. He belonged, however, to a good New England family, long noted for their love of education and economy, and he himself was a college graduate and possessed the advantage of early training and an assured position. He had come to New York with the determination to become a rich man, and had become so; gradually, irresistibly gathering money as a snowball gathers snow. While he had no very great or remarkable qualities he had absolutely no counterbalancing defects, and everything in him worked as irresistibly towards one end, his own aggrandizement, as a well oiled machine obeys the hand that guides it. He was not tempted to stray from the path which he had marked out for himself, either by evil passions or conscientious scruples, for one seemed to him as fool-

ish as the other. He went his quiet immutable way, as undeterred by generosity or remorse, as one of his own ancestors prosecuting their heavenly career, in much the same manner, in which he prosecuted his earthly one.

Charles Sherwood's daughters were like him, as an acorn is like an oak, or a grain of corn like a full grown ear, with this difference, that the acorn and the grain of corn may become respectively oak and full grown ear, but by no possible progression of the law of growth would Mr. Sherwood's daughters ever attain his greatness. The inspired common sense and uncommon executive ability, to which his success was due, was found in them in such diluted form as excessive absorption in practical details, upon which they bestowed the same care that he did upon his business; but the business repaid it a hundred-fold, while it is a question whether theirs would not have run quite as smoothly with half the expenditure of time and attention.

"Elizabeth's housekeeping reminds me of a canon pointed against a mouse," once said Isabel, "the effort is so tremendous and the result so small." However, Isabel was angry when she made the remark and could hardly be considered a fair judge. Certainly no one could doubt that Elizabeth's house was well kept; but whether it justified the sacrifice of her whole life and domestic happiness is a matter that will be decided according to individual taste and character. It could not be denied that it was clean from garret to cellar; that each individual duster hung on the nail intended for it; that it was

dusted at one hour, and swept at another, and polished at a third, all by cast iron rule and schedule; that if the housemaid were to lay one of Mr. Sherwood's socks marked A in the pile marked B Elizabeth would become aware of it instantly by some occult means, involving agony of mind on her part and dire retribution for the offending housemaid. The care and tact and judgment required to run every minute detail of a large establishment in this fashion would have sufficed to garrison an army; but after all Elizabeth's house was in appearance very much like other people's houses,—except in being rather more uncomfortable,—for the spirit of unrest which pervaded it lingered in the air and made an aroma of disquiet which could be distinctly felt, if not seen, on entering it.

What Elizabeth did for her house Catherine did for her children, and the amount of thought, labour, time and ability expended on their bringing up would have successfully managed an orphan asylum. The children, being vigorous, bore it well, in fact better than did their father, who had lost what remnant of health and good temper he once possessed in the process; for just as Elizabeth's house was filled with a spirit of unrest, so did Catherine's children create a tense atmosphere about her. They were always being drugged for an ailment, or corrected for a fault, or punished for transgressing a rule,—and Catherine's rules for her children were as numerous as were Elizabeth's for her housemaids,—while in the end Catherine's children, like Elizabeth's house, were very much like other people's children and houses.

Let us, however, not for an instant suppose that Margaret's interest in the world at large was one whit less intense than that of her sisters for their domestic duties. Nature had intended her for the wife of a poor man, to pinch and save and manage and do the impossible for a large family on a small income. Fate had made her the childless wife of a rich man, with no employment for her undoubted talent of making one dollar do the work of two and one person the work of four. The usual result followed. A great talent is rarely latent; if balked of its proper channel it makes one for itself, as careless of the injury it inflicts as were it indeed the destructive sheet of water to which we have compared it. Margaret adopted the world for her family, and managed and saved and pinched for it in theory, just as she might have done in actual practice for an actual family; and the world, and especially that small portion of it represented by her sister-in-law, Isabel, bitterly resented this attempted management, and not only adhered more closely still to its own ways but displayed an ungrateful resentment towards its would-be benefactress.

"If you would only let Margaret choose your linen for you, you would make her your friend for life," her husband had once said; but Isabel at that time lacked the tact to carry out this well-meant suggestion. As we have seen, she also sometimes lacked it where Elizabeth was concerned, controlling her temper but not her impatience at her sister-in-law's foibles, struggling fiercely for a kind of humorous philosophy which might enable her not only to laugh;

but even to sympathise with the faults of her husband's family. "They are not making fools of themselves to spite me, as I used to think," she argued ruefully; "they are as they were made, I suppose, and deserve pity rather than blame. Think of living all the time with such a disposition as Elizabeth's. Heavens! It is as hard for her as it was for Bennie when he wore a pair of squeaky shoes and said to me with his eyes as big as saucers, 'You may think it is bad for you, Mamma, but it is much worse for me, for I can never get away from them!'"

Elizabeth had been particularly irritating that afternoon, it seemed to Mr. Sherwood, for after Isabel's departure he turned to his daughter, saying:

"I wish, my dear, though I suppose it is asking a great deal, that you would contrive to be a little more conciliating to Isabel. I shall be disappointed if she does not spend the autumn with us."

"It is asking a great deal, Father, as you justly observed," answered Elizabeth with her tranquil literalness, "and I have prayerfully tried to do so; but really Isabel," this last with more animation, "has a most irritating lack of punctuality and decorum. Think of her inviting a total stranger to your house!"

"My house is quite open to any of Isabel's guests," said Mr. Sherwood drily. "I think you will hardly deny your sister-in-law's social position, Elizabeth."

"No-o," she admitted unwillingly, for Isabel's social career was a source of both pride and annoyance to Elizabeth; pride as it related to the connection between them, and annoyance as it conflicted with her own views of Isabel. "I am saying nothing

against her position, though I have little in common with some of the people she goes with; but it seems to me she showed a strange forgetfulness of it, this afternoon, which turned out better for her than she had any right to expect."

"Hardly, Isabel has very quick social instincts."

"Surely, Father, you would not choose your friends by instinct!"

"I might do worse; but it is not here a question of choosing a friend but an acquaintance."

Elizabeth ruminated. "I never choose an acquaintance who may not become a possible friend," she said sententiously. "However, Isabel and I are not alike;—she is what I suppose would be called a modern woman,—but I will try and get on with her, Father, since you wish it, only—" with exasperation, "Bennie must be more careful about that dog!"

"Very well, I will remonstrate with Bennie," answered Mr. Sherwood.

CHAPTER III

"He was the mildest mannered man
That ever skuttled ship or cut a throat."

BYRON—"Don Juan."

THE Sherwood house, in its present form, was of Italian type, an Italian of the seventies, when the faults of that style were just beginning to be imitated; but time had as usual stepped in, and added a certain charm, surely absent from the structure at its first appearance. The slate grey of its stone had acquired a warm tint; its sharp lines had become softened, its crudities concealed, until at last it appeared to form with the landscape an impressive if formal whole. This Hudson River landscape had at first resisted stoutly its transformation into the Italian style; but now it seemed to have forgotten its rancour, and to take pleasure in clothing its foreign model with a native luxuriant growth. The hedge of shrubs, enclosing the front terrace,—which crowned the height on which the house stood—had grown to such mammoth proportions that the effect of its bad planting disappeared; and its growth hid the awkward curve of road, winding upward from the gate about the hill. Even the side terrace, facing the river,—a mere bald sweep of lawn from the tennis court to the flight of steps at the end—had ac-

quired a dignity in harmony with its setting, which made it seem a fitting ante-chamber to the Italian garden just below. Perhaps the view encouraged this illusion, for the river,—sweeping by, with the majestic ebb and flow which gives such unique quality to the scene,—was so concealed beneath the luxuriant vegetation as to assume the appearance of an Italian lake, which the mountains, rising sharply behind it, carried on.

On this brilliant autumn day the blue of the sky was reflected and intensified in the deeper colour of the river. Little white clouds every now and then streaked the horizon, while the wind—that strong west wind, which is at the same time the bane and the boon of this region—was for once still. It barely rustled the branches of the maple trees upon which the terrace looked down, while beyond on the lawn, which appeared to reach completely to the river, the outline of the evergreens stood out as sharply as in a pen and ink sketch. It was one of those days peculiar to the place and to the season, when the sun is not too hot, nor the air too cool; but perfection reigns supreme. Down the river two sail-boats were slowly creeping, and their motion had the rhythmic movement of the water, as it swept onward to the sea.

The Sherwood family were all on the terrace together; Mr. and Mrs. Corning having recently arrived for a visit; and Mr. and Mrs. Grey, who occupied a cottage in the neighbourhood, having driven over to welcome them.

“We only need Jack now to make us complete,” said Mrs. Corning, looking about her, decisively.

She was very like Elizabeth, only plumper, more care-worn, and more authoritative, while Mrs. Grey bore the same resemblance to her sister in an inverse direction.

"I expect Jack almost any time now," said Mr. Sherwood, looking up over Bennie's curly head from a toy he was mending.

They were on the terrace, overlooking the Italian garden, and the outlines of its box-edged paths could still be discerned, though the box itself had grown far beyond an edging and formed almost a garden of evergreens in itself. This was before the fashion for old gardens, and Mr. Sherwood's daughters had looked at it rather askance, though fortunately his conservatism had preserved it, and satisfied their artistic cravings by a series of magnificent beds of coleus and geraniums.

The three sisters were comfortably seated within sight of the wonderful view which, spread out before them, presented almost a theatrical effect of river and mountains, but it is doubtful if they observed it, for Elizabeth was embroidering a set of towels and Mrs. Grey was busily engaged in knitting, while Mrs. Corning talked to them. Isabel's figure could be seen in the distance, playing tennis with her brother-in-law, Ned Grey, and Mr. Corning as usual smoked in silence. It was certainly a domestic scene.

"What are you knitting?" demanded Margaret, whose hands being unoccupied left her more leisure for conversation.

"A jersey for Eddie," answered Catherine innocently, without looking up.

"It is my opinion, Catherine, that you coddle that child far too much," went on Margaret. "Children should be hardened; now look at Bennie, I will say for Isabel that in that one respect she brings him up very sensibly. The day is too warm for a coat, and you have wrapped Eddie up as though it were winter," and she glanced at Eddie's small muffled figure.


"I can not make you understand, Margaret," said her sister plaintively, "that children differ. Bennie is made of iron, while Eddie is a delicate child who needs extreme care."

"Nonsense, he is not delicate at all, or if he is, it is you who have made him so. Throw away all those wraps and let him play about in the sun and he will be all right."

"If you know so much about children, it is a pity you have not some of your own to practise on," said Catherine with exasperation. "Eddie is not Bennie, and I am sure I hope he never will be."

"So do I," said Elizabeth, joining in, "for one such child in the house is enough. He and that wretched little dog of his do more damage than their necks are worth, and I can not get my father to see it at all; he is so blind about Bennie."

"And a fortunate thing it is," went on Mrs. Corning, unexpectedly carrying the war into another quarter. "You have made such a fetish of your house, Elizabeth, that if my father did not sometimes interfere you would exclude us all, as well as Bennie. I cannot seem to make you understand that such excessive care is quite unnecessary; train your servants properly, throw responsibility on them, and you will



not have half the trouble you now have and everything will go on just as well."

"That is very easy to say, Margaret, and quite impossible to carry out, as you ought to know by this time," answered Elizabeth, with heightened colour; the worst part of Mrs. Corning's strictures being that they had generally a vein of truth which did not make them any more acceptable to her family.

A stranger hearing these raised voices, and seeing such apparent excitement, would have been led to conclude that a quarrel was imminent, but he would have been quite mistaken. The three sisters were devoted to each other and their irritation was only skin deep, adding a piquant flavour to what might otherwise have been a colourless conversation.

Mr. Sherwood and his son-in-law smoked on unheedingly, too accustomed to these daily differences to notice them; for Isabel was the only one on whom they jarred, and Isabel was fortunately not there on this occasion.

"I expect a visitor this afternoon," calmly went on Margaret, dismissing the former subject as quietly and irrelevantly as she had brought it up. "I met Arthur Hinsdale coming up in the train, and I invited him to call with his cousin whom he is visiting; wonderful man he is, Father, have you met him?"

"Met who, Arthur Hinsdale or his cousin?"

"Arthur Hinsdale, of course; a writer on social subjects, a philanthropist, and a poet, a really delightful combination, not that I care particularly

about poetry, but it gives him a certain breadth of mind. He and I are undertaking some experiments at the settlement, and he has been invaluable to me. Henry admires him, do you not, Henry?"

"Very much," briefly answered that gentleman. "He has more sense than some of your friends, Margaret."

"Yes; Arthur has sense of a sort, but no practical ability. I am obliged to supply that, but then I have enough for two."

"Who is this Arthur Hinsdale?" demanded Elizabeth.

"I am sure I do not know; I met him at the settlement."

"And you make a friend of a man you meet that way without any further inquiry?" Elizabeth asked in a horror-struck tone.

"Really, Margaret, that is extraordinary, even for you!" echoed Catherine.

"What do I care who the man is, if he can be of service to me in my work?" answered Margaret, serenely. "Stay, I believe—yes, I am sure—that his mother was a Miss Lancy, and that the cousin he is about to visit is Walter Coffin, one of your engineers, Father."

"So I supposed; I have met Arthur Hinsdale."

"You do not mean it! When?"

Mr. Sherwood only answered: "In the way of business," in the tone his children had learned to respect. In reality it was in regard to the condition of some of his tenements.

"By the by," said Margaret, dismissing Arthur's good qualities as she had before dismissed Elizabeth's house, "who is this Walter Coffin?"

"You will soon be able to see for yourself," said her father, "for here he comes," pointing to two figures advancing toward them from the house, followed by the majestic figure of the butler, and his assistant bearing tea.

It was indeed Walter, and if he had looked too well dressed before, when he first met Mr. Sherwood, he certainly looked so now in all the glory of his six feet of white flannels. Elizabeth's eyes dwelt on him with pleasure, and her manner became almost cordial, as her eye took in his appearance and marked the difference between his cousin and himself. Arthur was a gaunt, loosely jointed man, and his dark cavernous eyes—deeply set above high cheek bones—looked out with curious intentness from a pale face over which the skin seemed to have been too tightly drawn. His voice was low and soft and he spoke slowly with a peculiarly distinct articulation, and when he smiled his pale lips parted gently like a child's, as though with good will toward the world. His face was redeemed from ugliness by his expression, and his appearance from commonplaceness by his manner, which commanded respect even from those who disliked him, and they were many. On this occasion, as he returned Margaret's cordial greeting and took a place beside her, not unaware of her family's hostile glances, that same family was not exactly able to despise him, for that he was far too unconcerned, and too dignified.

"How do you do," said Mr. Sherwood briefly to both young men; then to Bennie, who was hovering near, "Tell your mother that Mr. Coffin is here," and in a moment she came towards them, with her racket in her hand.

Isabel's tennis costume was certainly not worn for show—being of the most business-like—though it did not become her badly, and her face was flushed with exercise and her hair slightly ruffled with the wind; but Walter's eye lingered on her with pleasure. Mrs. Baker had been right, she certainly did make people smile.

"How are you?" she said in her half abrupt, half cordial way. "Glad to find you have come to play. I need not introduce you to the family I see, and it would not matter much if I did, for it would take you some time to get us straightened out. Yes, tea, please," to Elizabeth, "without sugar."

"Isabel, I want to introduce an old friend of mine. Mr. Hinsdale—Mrs. Sherwood," here interposed Margaret; while Elizabeth sulkily poured tea and wished Isabel's manners to men were a little different. Catherine meanwhile had promptly whisked one coat off her small son and promptly whisked another on, all unnoticed.

"How do you do, Mr. Hinsdale?" said Isabel, smiling up at him. "Will you play?"

"Certainly not," Margaret answered for him. "Henry will make up the set," with a glance at her husband, "Mr. Hinsdale and I need the time to discuss our work," and he assented, just as her husband had, for Margaret seemed born to be obeyed.

In the meanwhile Walter had seated himself by Isabel, and watched her as she slowly drank her tea, with one arm round Bennie—who, with Toodles beside him, stood drinking in every word,—for Bennie vastly admired the “nice man who made the car go.”

“Will you tell me,” asked Bennie’s mamma, “how it happens that my sister-in-law is a friend of Arthur Hinsdale’s?”

“Is there any reason why she should not be?” asked Walter; in the slightly formal manner which would have passed for stiffness in any one less self assured.

“Every reason. Mr. Hinsdale is a poet, for one thing.”

“How did you discover that so soon?”

“Because I have read his poetry.”

Walter’s eyes smiled, while the corners of his mouth drooped in a characteristic way.

“Really!” he said, “I am so glad, for I feared no one did!”

“Then you are mistaken. In the second place, Mrs. Corning is a philanthropist.”

“So is Arthur.”

“Not in the same way, I am sure. Margaret wants to reform the world; while Mr. Hinsdale only wishes people to be happy.”

“Did you learn all this from his poetry?” Walter asked gravely.

“Yes, and from people who know him. I, too, have clever friends, Mr. Coffin, though you might not judge so from my surroundings.”

“Indeed I do not doubt it,” he answered in his

stiffly formal way, "but you see I hardly think of Arthur as clever, because I have known him so long. He is my cousin, as well as a great friend."

"That is funny! I never saw two men more unlike!"

Walter's face relaxed under his mask.

"You are determined, I see, not to allow me any credit from Arthur's friendship?"

"I prefer to judge you by yourself. Oh! are you ready to play?" she said to her brother-in-law, who strolled up at this moment. "Come, Mr. Coffin, and we will make them work hard, even if they beat us in the end."

"You should imitate Henry's interest in tennis," Margaret remarked meanwhile to Arthur Hinsdale. "It would do you good, and you look pale and tired; you have as usual been working too hard."

This was said, not sympathetically, but disapprovingly, and Arthur did not venture to point out its inconsistency, merely replying deprecatingly:

"I intend to take a holiday here for a few days with Walter, and get all the diversion I can."

"That is well. Now tell me how you left the work," and they entered into plans at the settlement which would interest no one outside themselves.

"So these are your obnoxious millionaires, Arthur!" Walter said a little later, as the two young men were leaving. "They do not seem to be as objectionable as you have made them out to be."

"Few people do, when they are civil to you!" answered Arthur, letting his eye rest moodily on the beautiful river, which lay before them like the milky

way in the white moonlight. "I have no doubt the Prætorian guards considered Cæsar a kind and munificent master."

"So he doubtless was—to them! Every one has his own use in this world, Artie, even a rich man. See what he has done for this place!"

"Which would have been better off without him in the end!" Arthur said moodily, flicking the dry leaves with his cane.

"There I differ with you! *I* certainly would not!" Walter replied in the monotonous voice which so ill suited his incisive manner of expression, "'it is ill speaking against the bridge which carries you across,' and this one has done so, both figuratively and literally."

"I am glad of that, for your sake; but mark my words, Walter," and Arthur struck again angrily at the leaves, "I know Mr. Sherwood, and he never does a service without expecting an equivalent. The time will come when he will expect one from you, and it may not be one that you will care to pay," and he stirred up a perfect avalanche of leaves.

"Nonsense, he is getting his equivalent from me now, in first-class work, though I say it myself. Look here, Arthur, do you know you are growing bitter, and nothing so ill becomes a poet!"

Arthur glowered darkly before him. "I think I shall give up poetry," he said at last with infinite bitterness.

"Why?" asked his cousin unwillingly sympathetic.

"Because no one understands or cares for it any longer."

"Some people do!" answered Walter with a thought of Isabel.

"And because it is of no use."

Walter did not contradict this assertion, being secretly of the same opinion; only saying with a praiseworthy effort at impartiality:

"You cannot always tell about that."

"And I want to help people," continued Arthur.

He paused and Walter laid a hand on his shoulder as he asked: "Are you down on your luck, old man, or is it your old grievance?"

"What is my old grievance, pray?"

"Injustice."

"Injustice! Well, yes, I suppose it does amount to that in the end. I have fought it, Walter, all my life, and I suppose my dying breath will be spent in cursing it."

As he made the statement in soft, even tones, that contrasted strangely with its character and with the peculiar glance of his mild blue eyes, he looked so curiously aloof from a world, which yet possessed the power to shake him to its depths, that he puzzled as well as irritated his cousin.

"But we are bound to have injustice, Arthur," he said, struggling against both feelings, "so long as we have people, so why not face the fact at once and be done with it! What difference does it make, after all, what they think or say about us? We are men, and live in a free country where our efforts count; so what does a little misconception matter?"

"It is not entirely for myself that I am fighting injustice!" remonstrated Arthur.

"I know it," Walter replied, struck with compunction, "but, after all, if there is one thing we do learn from the past it is that people must work out their own salvation. If a man can't fight for his rights he doesn't deserve to have them; while, on the other hand, you can no more put a pistol to a man's head and tell him he must be just than that he must be a Christian. Reformation to be sincere must come from within."

Arthur looked at him resentfully.

"So you would suppress all unselfish attempt to right injustice."

"No," Walter answered, his monotonous voice accentuating his incisive manner, "but I would leave it to work itself out gradually by natural means, instead of going at it with a pick-axe as you have done. We have enough to do in this world, heaven knows, without taking up the cudgels for a lot of parasites! Help people who help themselves, as much as you like; but let them inaugurate their own reforms; it is the only way!"

"You talk like a soulless brute, and a foolish one at that," Arthur said gently. "Your theory would leave the weak at the mercy of the strong and deprive them of the assistance they absolutely need to right their wrongs."

"So they should if they are wrongs which ought to be righted by the people themselves," Walter said unhesitatingly. "And as for you," he continued, "you are an artist, not a thinker or a man of action. If you meddle with social questions, you will make mistakes—I don't so much mind that, for other peo-

ple will have to pay for them—but if you get drawn in yourself, I know just how hard it will go with you. You will suffer so much over some worthless person that all energy will be crushed out of you. You are a poet, I tell you, stick to poetry.”

And as Walter paused, out of breath with his own vehemence, he suddenly realised that his words were in the way of conveying to his cousin a long needed warning.

Arthur Hinsdale had always felt any injustice towards another as keenly as if directed against himself, and for him it was not something to be borne, but something to be fought with despairing animosity; if with no chance of success. A slighting word, an unreasoning criticism, an unfair judgment, cut him like a knife, even when directed against those for whom he had no interest or affection; how much more as against a friend. His spirit boiled within him on these occasions, so that he felt impelled, in season and out of season, to defend people for whom he had no other affinity than that of being, like himself, misunderstood;—a tolerably large circle at all times! He was continually making the wrongs of others his own, to such an extent as to forget entirely the difference between *meum* and *teum*, and to feel himself in his own person, the victim of nameless oppression; and as usual in such cases, the world tended to justify his opinion of its injustice by unfailing misapprehension of his own motives.

So Arthur went forth upon his solitary way, returning contempt with disapproval, misunderstanding with anger, and both with very genuine moral indig-

nation. And with all this and beneath all this was that faint sickening sense of failure, that consciousness of the extraordinary difference between aspiration and fruition, image and reality, which has haunted every serious artist since the beginning of time. Arthur had no undue share of vanity; but he had a firm conviction of his own ability, which could not but be affected by the very great difference between it and both his accomplishments and reputation. He knew himself to be superior to the average man, and yet the average man was continually triumphing over him. This did not cause him so much distrust of himself as of others; but the result was in either case discouragement, rising at times to despair. Had it not been for this excessive sensitiveness and the secret agony which it caused him, his life might not have been unhappy, though it had little to make it otherwise. He eked out a precarious existence by doing editorial work for a well known magazine, which sometimes printed an article by him on social subjects, which few understood, or a poem, which few read. Yet, in spite of this—and that he had none of the luxuries and not many of the pleasures which people consider essential—Arthur enjoyed himself, thanks to the enthusiasm which gilded a commonplace existence with something of the radiance which a spiritual insight, like the sun, can cast over all.

This was shown now as they neared Mrs. Baker's cottage, and looking about him he suddenly exclaimed:

"Have you ever seen anything more beautiful? In

itself this is enough to make one forget your tirade!"

"What, where? What is it?" demanded his cousin, staring about him in great perplexity.

"There, you rank Philistine, there! Look at that view!" And Walter did look though he failed to see what was then passing in Arthur's mind.

For him, the mist, rising softly from the river in a faint thin vapour, seemed to cover all about it with a veil—as filmy and transparent as the one which only partly hides the beauty of a bride—and shining through it, making it even paler and more silvery, looked the moon—like the eyes of that same bride—glowing with reluctant longing and with love. While under its pure cold light everything shone out resplendent, the trees a softer green, the flowers a purer white; the rocks taking on faint curves of beauty, and the cliffs becoming grand heights, through which the river flowed, murmuring sweet messages of hope to Arthur's ears.

"It is like a woman's love, which for one moment transforms the world for us and then is gone," he murmured, and for once his cousin made no reply.

"Here is that pesky fog again!" exclaimed a voice behind them, and Mrs. Baker appeared as if in illustration of Arthur's last remark. "Better not stand out in it, for my poor husband used to say it always give ye malarly. However, I have an extra good supper to-night, on account of yer friend, Mr. Coffin, and perhaps that will help ye to ward it off."

Walter was privately inclined to consider this a very pleasant substitute for the clammy darkness of the night without—lovely as the sight had been, for

he was not sentimental and disliked views, like scenes, which seemed to demand it. And surely even his cousin was not inclined to cavil at the feast which they found spread out in Walter's little sitting-room—such food as has become now almost a thing of the past and was a treat even then. Such chicken, so soft and tender and white, and with such a flavour! So guiltless of the bondage of an incubator or the horrors of a cold storage plant. And such fish, so fresh and savoury and untainted with danger, as of the sauce concealing it! And such apples from a tree untouched by scale; and such vegetables—the last of the season—with the taste which no greenhouse or southern soil can give; and such eggs and butter, pure genuine products of Mrs. Baker's care and skill! Well was it for us when such a feast was here for all, and sad will be our fate if modern methods are successful in destroying it.

And when Walter, producing a bottle, exclaimed, "Here's to your success against injustice, Arthur, in a glass of my father's old wine!" the latter drank it with shining eyes, little dreaming what the success of that wish would mean to him.

CHAPTER IV

"The night has a thousand eyes
And the day but one;
Yet the light of the bright world dies
With the dying sun."

BOURDILLON.

ISABEL had lingered on the terrace some time after the others had gone. She sat there now, just as she had flung herself down after playing, with her racket still in her hand, and her sweater thrown about her; oblivious of the night air and the gathering mist, and of all but her own thoughts. She was roused at last by her father-in-law's voice saying:

"Are you there still, Isabel? You had better come in; you will take cold." And with a slight shiver she rose and came toward the window where he stood.

The light from within showed him her fresh face, still flushed with exercise, and brought out more plainly still, the difference between its expression and the look in her eyes. It seemed to Mr. Sherwood, observing her, that those eyes expressed a dread of what he was about to say; but that may have been merely the effect of his own self-consciousness.

"I have had a message from Jack, and he will be here quite shortly now, Isabel. I am glad he is able to come and I hope that we may be able to keep him with us for some time."

"I hope so too," she answered.

He went on in his cold even tones:

"Jack did not strike me as looking particularly well when I saw him."

"Very likely," she answered with averted face.

"He has not the strength to keep the pace of those men with whom he goes."

"No, I suppose not."

"And it struck me that with your help we might be able to make it pleasant for him here."

"I wish we might."

He moved a little impatiently and she added, looking at him for the first time as if in answer to it:

"I am afraid, Mr. Sherwood, that if you want to make it pleasant for Jack you must not depend entirely on me. Jack loves company."

"I know," he said eagerly, "and I was rather glad on that account that those young men were here. They will help to entertain him."

"You cannot depend entirely on them," Isabel answered quietly; "best ask a few of the women he likes; I will tell you several."

Mr. Sherwood made an attempt to see her face; but she had again averted it.

"And do you like them, too?" he asked at last.

"Oh, yes, sufficiently so. I am not crazy about any women, you know, unless they are good sports! Only Mr. Sherwood, it seems a mean thing to say, but—"

"What is it?"

"You can never keep Jack here if you expect him to be punctual and orderly. He cannot help throwing his things about, and Elizabeth—"

"I will speak to Elizabeth."

"Then there is Bennie."

"What about Bennie?" he asked sharply.

She hesitated; as if trying to choose her words.

"I have brought Benny up to respect his father and to obey me; perhaps if he sees too much of Jack that may be difficult; you know how Jack is, and—"

She did not finish and he did not seem to expect that she would, saying merely:

"I will speak to Jack. Otherwise you have no objections and will help me."

"It would be unreasonable in me to object to my own husband; surely I will help you!" and she gave him her hand, and was about leaving, when some one entered the room, exclaiming:

"What are you two conspiring about here in the dark, and why am I not given a warmer welcome?"

"Jack!" exclaimed the two simultaneously.

"Yes, Jack!" replied the voice coming nearer, and making itself visible in the person of a slight young man with a pale face and a pleasant manner.

"How are you, Governor?" he said, shaking him warmly by the hand, "and you, Isabel?" kissing her—"exercising as usual. Your energy puts me to shame!"

"I wish it would, Jack," answered his father in a manner which belied the reproof in the words; looking at him with an expression that was as near affection as any sentiment which he was capable of feeling.

For Jack was like his mother; and his wife had been the one indulgence of which Mr. Sherwood had ever been guilty. She had been a pretty, foolish, extravagant woman, and she represented to her husband

the very flower of his own success; the perfected product of what his money had been able to do—and Jack was her son and had inherited her place. He had so far, in spite of all his faults, not entirely disappointed his father's hopes. He had married exactly as Mr. Sherwood had wished; for his appreciation of his daughter-in-law's family and social gifts was full as great as Elizabeth's, and undisturbed by any jealous feelings. Yes, Jack's wife and son were everything which could be desired; but Jack himself— Mr. Sherwood looking at him with affectionate partial eyes—but the eyes of a man of the world—shuddered a little, though he was not one to weaken or despair and he did not now.

"I must leave you," he said suddenly, "and you will want a little time together before dinner, which is at half-past seven, Jack," he added, a little pleadingly.

Jack nodded, and went upstairs with his wife, saying the while:

"Well, Isabel, has it been slow?"

"Yes, rather; but it is to *be* gay. Your father was just asking me about people to invite."

"Hum, at your suggestion, I suppose. Well, it may be just as well, for I cannot stand unmitigated family, and country air might not do me any harm for a bit. I have kept late hours recently and need rest. Why do you smile?"

"At your proposing to do exactly what we were scheming to make you," she replied indiscreetly. "Your father thought you looked fagged."

They had reached her room, which like the rest of

the house was on so vast a scale, that though of excellent proportions, it dwarfed everything in it, making the furniture and even the people themselves seem for the moment small and insignificant. Jack looked peculiarly so to his wife that evening as he lay on the sofa; with his arms stretched languidly above his head; while it struck her that even his delicate features had a pinched, drawn look. He was unlike his sisters in being both slight and good looking, with a sort of blonde picturesqueness, only relieved from effeminacy by a height which by no means implied strength. His manner was pleasant, in a half insolent way and his face had the curious quality of one of Velasquez's pictures: the feline grace which peers from their narrow mocking eyes and hovers like a sneer about their thin lips.

"And I suppose you don't care how I look," he said at last.

Isabel's eyes had been fixed upon her husband; but before answering, they travelled slowly around the room, as if taking in at the same time its vastness and her own insignificance. Her clear eyes were a trifle veiled and her strong erect form drooped wearily. She felt somehow intensely lonely just then.

"My caring will not do very much good if you go on at this rate," she said at last, very gravely. "You have not the strength for it, Jack, as you know very well!"

Jack did know, having quite enough realisation of his delicate constitution as to make him thoroughly uncomfortable though not to deter him from over indulgence.

"Where is Bennie?" he added to effect a diversion.

"At his supper probably. Oh, here he is now; Benny, come and speak to Papa."

Bennie, appearing at the door at this instant, with his unfailing companion at his heels, backed instead of entering.

"Bennie," said his mother again, "here is Papa; come and kiss him."

"He kicked Toodles," answered her son, backing still further like a restive horse.

His father flushed darkly and Isabel interposed with sharpness.

"And I shall be strongly inclined to do the same to you, unless you mind me at once. Come here and kiss Papa."

This at last produced obedience and Bennie crept shyly forward and held up his face, saying,

"You promise not to do it again, Papa?"

"Yes, I promise, you unforgiving little imp. I believe you care more for Toodles than for me."

"Of course, Papa. He could not do without me."

"Oh! and you think I could! Well, you are your mother's own boy—about the dog, I mean. Do you remember, Isabel, the one you used to have? There, run along, I will not keep you any longer!" he continued to Bennie, who fled precipitately and Isabel, answering the look he turned toward her, said:

"I am sorry, Jack, and I do what I can, but he is an obstinate child, a little like you, and does not forget. Keep him out of your way unless—"

"Unless I can set him a better example, you mean. Heavens, I do not wish the child to look at me like

that! It is bad enough to have you—and about a dog, too! I was not myself then.”

She did not answer and he went over to her and putting his hand under her chin raised her face to his.

“There I have come out here to be good, and you should help me, instead of putting a grave face on it.”

“I will help you all I can,” she said in a low voice.

“You know the best way to help me is to show me you care.”

She shivered again and moved away a little:

“Yes, I care, Jack.”

“Very much?”

She had grown pale but she looked at him steadily.

“As much as I care about anything.”

“Very well, consider it settled then, that I prove a model husband during my stay,” and again she shivered a little.

The next morning rose bright and clear, dissipating the mists of the night before; and the air, too, had all the freshness, without the chill, that tells of winter soon to come. Isabel, descending the stairs for her morning’s ride, had a corresponding sense of exhilaration which, like the dawn, dissipated her former depression. It seemed to her that the fears, which had haunted her then, were mere spectres of the night, which the sun could drive away; that life was sweet and youth eternal; that

“God’s in his Heavens
All’s right with the world.”

An early Scotch superstition has associated this

sudden unfounded gaiety, which we have all felt, with disaster, but it is hopefully a mistaken one.

Isabel sprang into her saddle, with little help from the groom, and cantered briskly down the driveway, humming a light song. She took very much her usual ride, through the woods, to the top of the hill—which was the highest point around. Then past the old mill—a time-honoured landmark—and by the river road home.

Only on reaching the highest point she stopped a moment, as she often did, and getting off her horse, led him to the edge of the rock which topped it, to see the view.

The place is sadly changed now;—a land company has taken possession of the river front; roads have been cut through; trees taken down; the old Loring mansion has become a road house; even the bridge noted in legend has not escaped;—but then it lay before her in all its ancient beauty. Isabel noted each familiar aspect of the view; the majestic sweep of the river; its glorious colouring; the sharp outlines of the hills which lined it; the brilliant green of the lawn; the almost tropical luxuriance of the undergrowth; in fact of the whole vegetation; as though the Hudson, sweeping through it, had left a trail of verdure behind. The old white house, famed in the history of her family lay before her; its square outlines and fine proportions making it a noted object, even amid its surroundings, as though for once Nature had here worked in harmony with the hand of man.

“You are out early, Mrs. Sherwood,” said a voice

beside her, and turning she saw Walter Coffin on his way to his work at the bridge. The sun shone full on his strong face and hardy figure, and brought a contrast to her mind, to escape from the thought of which she said gaily:

"Not so early for me. I generally take a ride before breakfast when I am here."

"Can you not get exercise enough after breakfast?"

"Very likely, but it is not the same thing, for this always seems to me the best way to begin the day. I have done it since I was a child."

He watched her face change and brighten as his eyes followed the direction of hers.

"Then you lived near here?"

"Yes. I have never really *lived* anywhere else," she answered softly. "I come over every morning to have a look at my old home. See—" and she pointed in the distance to the white house by the river.

"It was sold after my father's death to one of the family and my dream is to go back there, some day, to live."

This did not appear to Walter such an extravagant dream; but she misinterpreted his surprised look:

"Oh! I know it strikes you oddly, but to me there is no place like it in the world!"

As she spoke something of the majesty of the view gained upon him, unsusceptible as he usually was to influences of the kind. A little breeze had sprung up—it was never long absent, he noticed—and shook them as though they had been a pair of naughty children, meriting chastisement, and then passed on over

the landscape to sweep the veil of mist from off the river, as if drawing a curtain aside. The swaying of the branches beside them caused curious shadows to flit over the grass and curious whispering noises sounded also, making everything about them seem alive.

"Indeed it does not strike me oddly," Walter answered, watching the effect of the wind upon her hair, "for I have much the same feeling about my grandfather's old place at Combe St. Thomas in Devon where I used to stop as a boy. Some day I hope to go back there to live. What, do you mean you have been there?" as she gave a sudden start of recognition.

"I am not sure; the name is familiar to me and I have an idea that I passed through on a coaching trip I once made in Devon—but I am glad to hear you say this, because with most people their one thought is to get away from home, not to go back."

"Perhaps here," he said with some show of superiority, "but in England—"

"Oh! in England just the same; it is the spirit of the age, and you too must have felt it!—else what took you to South Africa?"

Walter's impassive mask lifted a little and his eyes gleamed as he answered: "The same feeling I suppose which brought your old Devon ancestors over the sea—gain, and the love of adventure! You cannot understand this?"

"Oh! Yes, I can, in a measure. As a girl, there is no adventure possible, on sea or land, in which I

have not taken part—in spirit. I found when I grew up and went out in the world that there is quite enough adventure to be had there, without seeking it.”

She flung back her head and glanced away to the beautiful old house among its trees; and Walter watched her, with a fascinated curiosity which he had felt from the first, and wondered what could be the meaning of the expression of her eyes, and why it so sharply contradicted that of her face, and again he was unable to answer.

“I know every bit of this country,” she said, turning to him again. “There is hardly a spot that I have not visited with my father.”

“He was a naturalist, was he not?” he roused himself to ask.

“He was a great scholar,” she answered with pride, “and had he lived he would have made his mark. He died too soon to profit by his work; but not too soon for others to reap the credit of it,” and her face hardened.

“He lived in a world of his own,” she went on, “the world of natural things, as real and tangible to him as our own; people did not exist for him; but among animals he was king and a magician as well. I can see him yet, as he used to go about here, and fairly charm them to come out and speak to him. I used to say that he talked with the birds, and that the squirrels loved to play with him. It amused me; but I did not understand it. Now I do a little.”

“About animals?”

“Yes. At times it seems to me as if there is a fel-

low feeling between us, which almost amounts to a language without words, and that I have an instinct inherited from my father. My horse tells me things which you would not understand and I answer in his own tongue. Do I not, darling?" and she leaned her face against his glossy neck, stroking it gently the while, and Walter found himself envying the animal she caressed.

A bell sounded softly in the distance, and she counted the strokes, eight of them, and suddenly sprang up.

"It is breakfast time," she said in her old alert way, "and I have been keeping you from your work. Forgive me. I suppose my mind was wool gathering, like my father's. Good-bye, and thank you for listening patiently."

He came forward, to assist her to mount; but her foot hardly touched his hand before she was in the saddle and away, leaving him the second time staring after her.

Isabel rode home at a great rate of speed; but breakfast was over when she reached there, and by the time she had changed and taken her own, the family had assembled in the living-room; and she was greeted by a silence more eloquent than words. Mr. Sherwood as usual came to her assistance.

"You have a fine colour, Isabel. Did you have a pleasant ride?"

"Yes, very. I apologise for being late. Where is Jack?"

"He breakfasted in his room, for which I am glad,

as he looked tired last night. By the by, now you are here, will you give Elizabeth a list of the people for the house party? You are the best judge of those who would amuse Jack."

Isabel joined her sister-in-law instantly and Elizabeth made way for her, pushing aside a pile of books and bills of all sizes.

"If you would wait one minute, Father," she said a little plaintively, "I am trying vainly to find out the trouble; there is a difference of twenty cents between my book and the grocer's bill; and the butcher has charged for two more pounds of roast beef than I ordered. It is most distressing."

"Really, Elizabeth, I shall have to put you down for a lecture on economy at my women's club," here broke in Margaret. "I had intended to give it myself, but you show such interest—"

"A lecture! What do you mean?"

"Yes, a lecture at the 'Mothers' Meetings.' It is a club," she went on to her father, "which Arthur Hinsdale and I are getting up at the settlement, to teach the women there how to keep house and bring up their children. We find them in urgent need of instruction and are planning a course of lectures on those subjects."

"But, Margaret," interposed her husband, "what in the name of common sense do you and Arthur Hinsdale know about bringing up children?"

"A great deal more than they do," she returned calmly, "and we are learning all the time. I have arranged for him to give a talk on 'infant mortality

and the care of the young,' and I intended to follow with 'How to keep house on 30 cents a day'; but if Elizabeth—"

"I should have given that last subject to Hinsdale as being one on which he was qualified to speak," chuckled her husband, "and would it not be well to get some one with a little experience to talk about children?"

"Certainly not, Henry. My one object has been to avoid people of experience. They know it all, like you, and will not make use of scientific methods. It is a thing we have to fight constantly."

"Well, if lack of experience is a qualification, then you and Hinsdale surely possess it!"

"But do you find, Margaret," here interposed her father, "that the people you are trying to instruct are inclined to follow scientific methods?"

"Not of course as much as we could wish but more than some of our own class," she retaliated, promptly carrying the war into the enemy's camp, "and quite as much, Father, as you are inclined to follow them yourself, in your farming methods."

"Come, Margaret," said Mr. Sherwood sharply, for as usual she struck home, "you had better leave farming out; that is a matter where I really cannot allow a woman to interfere."

"Suppose we go on with the invitations," said Elizabeth, who had in the meanwhile finished her accounts, as far at least as was possible without interviewing the delinquents; "we ought to get them off by the morning's mail."

So that when Jack did finally appear rather tired

and languid, he found that the family party he deprecated was in a fair way of being speedily broken up by an inroad of guests more to his taste. And Isabel going upstairs afterwards whispered to Toodles, whom she met coming down:

"Oh! my lamb, if only some one

'Would the gift a gie us
To see ourselves as others see us,
It would frae monie a blunder free us.'"

Toodles winked comprehendingly in reply. But Isabel continued her way to her room and took out an old map which she had used during her former visit to Devon, with her father, who in common with many New Englanders, boasted descent from several "worthies of Devon," and had therefore felt great interest in their birthplace.

She looked up Combe St. Thomas, with a faint return of her old-time enthusiasm. It was located, just as she had supposed, on the southeastern coast, and it seemed to her as if she had passed very near to it. She even seemed to recall the country about it, piecing together one thing and another, until she could almost see the narrow Devon lane, between its tall hawthorn hedges, with now and then a glimpse of the sea beyond; while a clumsy rustic pointed in the distance,

"There be the old Coffin house, Sir."

Yes, that must have been Walter's birthplace, and how vividly it all recurred to her, as she heard her father's voice call out gaily,

"Some day, Isabel, we will come back here and take

a cottage, you and I," and she had answered, "Indeed we will!"

Now she mused:

"Perhaps if things grow any worse! Perhaps, who knows?"

But only Toodles heard what she said.

CHAPTER V

"She moves a goddess, and she looks a queen."

POPE.

THE invitations to the house party were accepted with more unanimity than could have been expected from so short a notice; and Elizabeth was able soon afterwards to receive her guests with the same mixture of pride and annoyance, pleasure and disgust, with which she had formerly welcomed the advent of Isabel into their family circle. Elizabeth was the worldly member of it and considered by her sisters as something of a snob—a rather harmless worldliness injuring no one so much as herself—for it caused her to set her affections on the very people the least likely to appreciate her peculiar good qualities, while those very good qualities rendered her correspondingly sensitive to their faults.

Therefore her career in the so-called "smart set" was an uncomfortable one and had so far condemned her to a life of single blessedness, the men whom she affected being of a type who would as soon have thought of putting their heads in the lion's mouth as within her yoke. Elizabeth, by nature an old maid, had not regretted this so much, as her exclusion from little attentions, which were given as a matter of course to her sister-in-law, and denied, in the same way, to herself.

On this occasion she had no sooner recovered from her pleasure, on reading an account of the contemplated party in the morning paper, than she was disagreeably reminded of her disgust, by the manners of her guests on their first evening at Erncliff. She disapproved of them so completely—the women for their free and easy ways, their love of sport and contempt for domestic virtues; the men for their lack of reverence, their outspoken discussion of shocking subjects, and their attentions to other women and coldness towards herself—disapproved of everything about them, except themselves, whom she continued to regard as the very flower of a social order she adored.

The others enjoyed themselves far more and consequently made a far better impression. Jack was, of course, in his element, and his father a civil, if rather formal, host. Margaret was so taken up with enunciating her theories on social matters that she forgot to be disagreeable, and Catherine was fortunately detained at home by the illness of one of the children. So the house-party went merrily on, much to the enjoyment of Isabel, who found the change from the monotonous domestic atmosphere of the past few weeks as refreshing as it was pleasurable.

Walter Coffin, who, with his cousin received an invitation to dinner one evening, was struck not altogether agreeably at the transformation in her; Isabel the society woman being less fascinating to him than Isabel the lover of nature, though the former type was one to which he was far more accustomed. He watched her, with interest nevertheless, as she

stood the centre of a gay group in the drawing-room just before dinner; and though he did not go quite to Elizabeth's length in condemning her manners, they nevertheless jarred on him, as being, like her rather décolleté gown, too extreme to be altogether pleasant.

It is not our purpose to add lustre to these pages by an account of the social celebrities who graced Mr. Sherwood's house by their presence, and justified Elizabeth's pride on the occasion. Suffice it that they were as young and giddy and fashionable as heart could desire, and Isabel queened it among them most gaily.

Walter did not have a chance of speaking to her until after dinner. He took in a bright little débutante and got on so well with her that he had no pity to spare for Arthur's evident disgust. Something had evidently gone wrong with Arthur, but what it was did not transpire until later. Finally, just before the company settled to bridge, Walter found Isabel as she stood at a window opening on the piazza, with a cigarette in her hand. It was not then so much the fashion as now for women to smoke and play for money, and her doing so was a defiance of Elizabeth, who gasped in horror; but Walter was too accustomed to both to feel any qualms.

"I hope you reached home in time for breakfast, Mrs. Sherwood," he said, seating himself on the balustrade beside her.

"I did not, and would have received a severe reprimand but that my father-in-law was there to take my part; he generally does."

"He looks as if he might do so effectually," answered Walter, glancing at the clear-cut face, with its thin, tightly-closed lips, silhouetted against the window frame within.

"Yes, he is a tower of strength, and I like him on that account. To me, there is nothing so uninteresting as weakness."

"Then you must be frequently bored!"

Walter did not mean to glance about him; but she felt instinctively his inclination to do so.

"I am, and I see quite well what you mean; still a man is the more agreeable for possessing some social graces even if he have little else behind them."

"You are severe on my sex!"

"Am I, I do not mean to be, for I should be bored to death without them. However, I make no pretence at judging people. I take them as I find them, and get what diversion I can from them. Am I not right?"

"Perfectly, only—"

"Only what?"

"I wish you would tell me what you mean by a strong man."

She looked him squarely in the eyes, taking in with a certain pleasure their firm unflinching gaze, as she answered:

"A strong man is one who knows exactly what he wants, and is deterred by nothing in attaining it, except pity for the weak. Oh! is that you, Mr. Fenton? Yes, I will go for a stroll if you like. The old garden is pretty by moonlight—" and with a nod and a smile she left him and somehow the interest

of his evening went with her. At the same instant he heard Arthur's voice behind him:

"I say, shall we get out? I have had enough of this, if you have."

"Yes, if you like, I am quite ready to go."

It was only after their farewells had been made and they were on their way home together that Walter asked,

"What is the matter, Arthur? As my mother used to say, 'has anybody done anything to you?'"

Arthur smoked moodily.

"I cannot stand that Jack Sherwood," he grumbled.

"Really, I thought him rather a pleasant fellow; not his wife's equal by any means, but civil and obliging."

"His wife indeed, he is not fit to tie her shoe! Now there is a woman for you! So gracious, so charming—one might write a poem about her!"

"Before you do, please tell me what Jack Sherwood has done to you?"

"To me nothing," Arthur said with his childlike smile, "it is his manner I object to; in fact his whole personality; and then he was so insulting to Jeannie—"

"I did not know that he knew Jeannie!"

Arthur looked his disgust at the suggestion. "He does not; it was this way, Walter, and I had almost forgotten the circumstance until it was recalled to me to-night. About a year ago I took Jeannie to the play, as the manager had given me a box—you know that thing by X. that was so unsuccessful.

Jeannie was rather unwilling to go, for she has an antipathy to appearing in public places—putting herself up to be looked at, as she would express it—and on this occasion the event justified her. This Jack Sherwood (whom I did not then know by sight) was in the orchestra near us, and kept his glasses fixed on her the entire time. It was so unpleasant that she finally changed her seat to avoid it; she was white with rage—

“Hum,” said Walter, “I did not know Jeannie so disliked being looked at.”

“That is not all; when we left the theatre there was his automobile drawn up by the curbstone and there he was still staring. I have never seen Jeannie so annoyed. She said she had met him before in Paris, when he had acted in the same way, trying, I suppose, to force an introduction.”

“Is that all?”

“I should think it was quite enough; but it is not all. As I said I had almost forgotten about it, until reminded by his manner to-night.”

“What was the matter with his manner?”

“Everything! He had seen, I suppose, my indignation on the other occasion, which I was at no pains to conceal, and wished on the first chance to resent it.”

“That is likely enough,” answered Walter, laughing, “but you spoke about his manner; how about yours, Arthur? It was not gracious, I fancy.”

“Gracious, I should say not. What do you take me for?”

"Perhaps that may have had something to do with his resentment!"

"Really, Walter, you would make excuses for the devil himself, I believe, if he had a pretty wife!"

"Very likely; but in the meanwhile I would leave Jeannie to fight her own battles, which she is quite equal to doing, and avoid making an enemy of Jack Sherwood. He strikes me as a bad person to pick a quarrel with, and you have enough enemies already!"

"I certainly have!" answered Arthur, with gentle relish.

"And to change the subject, what do you say to a trip to-morrow to see Jeannie? Mother will be delighted to have us."

"Very well, I shall be pleased to go"—and so it was settled and Walter thought no more of the other matter.

Not so Margaret.

"Henry," she said to her husband that evening after they had retired to their room, "did you notice Jack's manner to Arthur Hinsdale?"

Mr. Corning looked up, with regret, from an interesting article on the currency, and answered abstractedly:

"No, what was wrong with it?"

"I thought him, if not rude, strangely lacking in cordiality. I was annoyed at Jack; he never had much ability; but at least he used to be civil; but I suppose since his marriage—"

"What has his marriage to do with his civility? Really, Margaret, you remind me of the Southerner

who thought the moon sadly changed since the war."

"It is all very well to be flippant, Henry; but Jack has changed lately and much for the worse!"

"That I grant you; but I fail to see how Isabel is to blame for it. Do you consider yourself responsible for all my misdeeds?"

"To a certain extent, yes; especially if I failed to call you to account for them; now Isabel does not give me the impression of doing this."

"Isabel has possibly learned that it is unwise to nag her husband. I wish—"

"I would learn it. Well, I never will, Henry, and you need not expect it; I am your gadfly and you could not get along without me. As for that poor little Bennie, I am really sorry for him; Jack alternately spoils and bullies him, and Isabel does not bring him up at all as I should."

"Very likely not; but then he is her child."

"I sometimes wish, Henry, that we might adopt him."

"Adopt him!"

"He would not be at all a bad child if I had charge of his bringing up. If Jack goes on at this rate he will certainly not live long; and in that case Isabel might be glad to give him up."

"I think, Margaret, that if I were you I would build no hopes upon that. Isabel will never consent to it."

"You cannot tell; more unlikely things have happened, and I suppose, Henry, you would have nothing against the plan."

"Nothing at all," he answered, abruptly turning

away, for he felt the lack of a child in his home in a way that his wife, with her multiplied interests in other people's children, would have found it hard to understand.

Nevertheless he fell to observing Jack after this, not with any fear of his immediate decease; but from a certain undefined dread which his wife's words had excited in him, for Margaret's wonderful knack for seeing unpleasant things had given him a secret but most pronounced belief in her predictions.

Yes, Jack had changed and in a way that he could not quite understand even with his superior knowledge of his brother-in-law's temperament and his capacity for injurious self-indulgence.

"I suppose," he said to himself, "it is with families as it is with flowers, when they produce one superior bloom the next crop suffers, and in this case Mr. Sherwood has used up the family vitality of two generations. Jack lacks it, but it may revert again to Bennie"—and that brought his mind back to the boy and he went to sleep thinking about him.

CHAPTER VI

"Tender-hearted stroke a nettle
And it stings you for your pains,
Grasp it like a man of mettle
And it soft as silk remains."

AARON HILL.

"**I**NDEED, my dear, I hope so, I sincerely hope so. It has been a great pleasure to me to give you the advantage of my experience, and you have been most gentle and docile in receiving it."

Thus said Mrs. Coffin to Jeannie, both sitting under the trees, the latter painting; the former embroidering impossible flowers upon an impossible table cover. In nothing could the great difference between them be more clearly seen than in these artistic productions. Nevertheless, they suited each other very well, and the acquaintance had proved a godsend to both. Mrs. Coffin had grown fond of Jeannie, as she always did of any one she was able to befriend; and she was also yielding insensibly to the excitement of taking part through her in a Bohemian life, of which she was both ignorant and disapproving; thus gratifying at the same time her curiosity and her love of management; perhaps the two strongest passions of which her nature was capable. Jeannie on her part was grateful for her kindness, and thankful in her inmost soul that she possessed such a friend; having

experienced enough indifference and neglect in her rather lonely little life, to appreciate its opposite.

The particular hope, which Mrs. Coffin expressed, referred to the success of Jeannie's work; which in her usual thorough-going fashion she had set herself to further, and which was to prove an easy task, as it is not difficult for an artist with the gift of painting quickly a handsome likeness of her subject, to obtain orders; unless her prices are more exorbitant than is apt to be the case: the price of a portrait seeming to vary inversely as its likeness, and to lose in beauty as a portrait what it gains in value as a work of art. Jeannie made no such mistake; her work was cheap, pleasing and lifelike, and what more can a prospective sitter exact?

On the present occasion she listened rather absent-mindedly to Mrs. Coffin's plans for her welfare, being more agreeably employed in watching for their coming visitors;—a telegram, received that morning, having announced that they were due to arrive in the afternoon—and at last, throwing down her palette and brushes, she leaned back in her chair, and stretched her arms lazily above her head. Jeannie was at all times liable to these sudden fits of idleness, alternating, as they did in this case, with equal periods of hard work.

"Tired, dear?" asked Mrs. Coffin, sympathetically.

"No," answered Jeannie, "bored; I mean," correcting herself, "I hate my work!"

"Now I thought it so pretty," said her companion, still more sympathetically.

"That may be," answered Jeannie, unappeased,

"but I hate doing anything that I don't want to."

"Well, of course, it is not always pleasant," said Mrs. Coffin, complacently, "but it is such a satisfaction that I think one feels repaid. Now I have always done my duty, and I think that is the reason I have had such a pleasant life!"

As she uttered this bland declaration, Jeannie looked up at her curiously out of the corners of her eyes. Yes, there could be no doubt about it—the smile she saw was quite a genuine one.

"I have had a pleasant life, too," she answered, "when other people would let me;—but then I have always made a point of it— You see I must have amusement," she added firmly.

"No harm in that, child, if you remember that this life is not all," said Mrs. Coffin, indulgently.

"In that respect I have rather modern ideas," Jeannie continued, watching her.

"I know, dear, you have not had the advantages of early training," Mrs. Coffin answered still indulgently.

"And I believe that our principal duty is to have our own way."

"No objection to that if it is a good way."

"Why, Mrs. Coffin, you have quite modern ideas yourself!"

"Not at all, my child; I disapprove of them entirely; except of course when they are correct."

Just as she uttered her last remark the sound of wheels was heard, and soon afterwards the young men appeared, making their way from the house to the orchard, where the two ladies sat.

Mrs. Coffin received them affectionately, and Jeannie with her usual gentle cordiality, which almost seemed to turn her good-morning into a caress.

"Yes, we are both very well," she was saying a little later, "and Mrs. Coffin has made it so pleasant for me that I have had no time to feel lonely. I hope you have both been equally amused."

"I have enjoyed myself very much," answered Walter, "and it has been fine having Arthur there, in more ways than one, as through him I have become acquainted with the Sherwood family."

"The Sherwood family!" exclaimed Jeannie, dropping her palette.

"The Sherwood family?" added Mrs. Coffin in some surprise.

"Nothing of the kind," said Arthur irritably. "You would have met them anyway, and as for me, I never knew one of them in my life till the other day, except Mrs. Corning, with whom I have worked in the Settlement for months."

"And do you deny," continued his cousin teasingly, "that you took me there to call, and afterwards to a dinner, and entertained me all the way home with Mrs. Jack Sherwood's perfections?"

"Mrs. Jack Sherwood!" again repeated Jeannie, and turning to Arthur in a voice that expressed surprised irritation, "I did not know that you knew her."

"Nor do I," said the latter sharply. "I never met her till the other day, and this is only Walter's way of teasing me, and a very poor one, I think."

"So do I," interposed Mrs. Coffin. "Really, Wal-

ter, you are very unreasonable. Why should not Arthur like Mrs. Jack Sherwood, and why should he not take you there to call?"

"Why, indeed?" laughed her son, and Arthur turned away with a pettish movement, quite conscious of Jeannie's displeasure. This he was to become still further convinced of, after Walter, compunctious at the effect of his words, had taken his mother away, and left them alone together.

"I assure you, Jeannie," Arthur said, with true masculine tactlessness, joining her where she sat busily painting, "that this is one of Walter's silly jokes. I hardly know Mrs. Jack Sherwood."

Jeannie stared at him, with a steely expression in her eyes.

"And what is it to me, pray, whether you do or not?" she answered, her voice taking on its harshest cadence.

"Nothing, of course," said Arthur, meekly, "except that you might take sufficient interest in me to know that I am not inconsistent enough to run after people of that sort, especially when I remember that you have occasion to dislike Jack Sherwood."

"I dislike him!" and Jeannie's displeasure broke at last. "What do you mean, Arthur, by such an insinuation? I hardly know the man; you saw yourself how I treated him; you are trying to cover up your own faults by putting them on to me! What difference can it make to me who you like, and why should I expect you to be above the weakness of paying attention to a silly society woman, who wants the admiration of every man she meets?" and Jeannie

got up and began to put together her painting materials with shaking fingers.

Arthur's heart swelled at this unkindness, while it whispered to him at the same time, that it might be a left-handed compliment; but only meekness showed in his tone as he replied:

"Indeed, you do me great injustice, and Mrs. Sherwood too! You know perfectly that except yourself I never notice any woman, and that you have no occasion to be jealous of any one."

She turned on him at this, in a sudden fit of rage, which swept away at the same time all her gentleness, and also all her carefully acquired good breeding.

"Jealous! me jealous!" she gasped, with such vehemence that the tears almost came with it. "How dare you think I could lower myself to be jealous of you? Oh! you needn't think I don't see that, in spite of all the rot you talk about sympathy and fellow-feeling for the poor, that you're just what you always were—a snob at heart! I feel for them—I sympathise with them for I have been one of them; and let me tell you, Arthur, that your feeling against injustice as compared to mine isn't worth that!" and she snapped her fingers in his face. "I know the thing itself. I've been wronged, I've been injured, I've been insulted, in a way no mere man with any silly theoretical interest can ever pretend to understand." And Jeannie sat down on the garden seat and burst into tears.

Arthur looked at her with a despairing bewilderment, which was the best commentary upon the un-

usual character of this outbreak, annihilating him as it did more by its mystery than by its injustice. Whatever Jeannie's troubles, she had so far borne them with a cheerful philosophy, which made her present breakdown the more startling. For the moment his surprise overcame his sympathy, the next a rush of tenderness succeeded it, as he bent over her and took her hand:

"Jeannie, my dear Jeannie"—she made an effort to withdraw it—"how can you say a thing like that? Your wrongs are mine"—the hand remained in his—"and so are your enemies!" At this the hand returned a faint pressure. "For I assure you that if any one has injured you they have injured me too, and I will hunt them down till they are obliged to do you justice." The tearful face was raised to his. "You believe me? Tell me that you do."

Jeannie had dried her tears at his words and now sat looking at him, a soft light in her eyes and a half smile beginning to part her lips.

"Arthur, dear," she said at last, laying her hand gently on his clenched one as he stood beside her, "you are a darling, and I am an ungrateful little wretch, to tease you;" and here Jeannie got up and began to smooth her hair. "I know I can depend on you, and if I need you I will let you know; but I have put my troubles behind me," she continued resolutely, "except at some such time as this!" and her lip trembled again. "I am nervous and upset to-day, that is all, and the thought of your going back on me was very bitter!" Arthur made an effort to protest; but she stopped him. "Never mind,

dear, my troubles, such as they are, are over and don't need any avenging! Thank you for your affection, which I appreciate even if I am not able to return it," and she gave him her hand and rose to join the others, leaving Arthur in perhaps the condition she desired; groping about in a blind maze, not knowing whether to feel pleasure or pain, elation or disgust, satisfaction or discouragement; knowing only that women were more strangely, wonderfully, inconsequentially made than even he had dreamed; and that while he pitied and adored Jeannie, he certainly did not understand her.

In the meanwhile, Mrs. Coffin was taking Walter gently to task.

"You should not tease your cousin, my son; he was annoyed, I could see that quite well, and so was Jeannie, though for the life of me I cannot see why." Walter smiled.

"You cannot; never mind, you will later. As for Arthur's being annoyed, I suppose it is because he has talked so much against millionaires and their faults of omission and commission that it is rather a joke finding him hand and glove with Mrs. Corning, and the guest of the Sherwoods; that is all. He is too sensitive by far, and needs me to poke fun at him occasionally."

"I think your cousin is in the right, Walter, and it is bad taste in you to allude so often to differences of fortune between them. The Sherwoods are naturally civil to you and Arthur; people like them always seek association with us, and it would be ungracious in him to hang back just because they had

more money than he. Really snobbish, I should consider it."

"Oh! indeed, Mother! Then you would consider it snobbish for me to refuse a favour from Mr. Sherwood?"

"A favour? Has he offered you one?"

"Not exactly, but a rather curious thing happened this morning. I received a letter from our superintendent stating that he was sorry to lose me, but that I 'had been so strongly recommended for another position of more importance that he was obliged to relinquish my services here; which fortunately are no longer imperative, as the work nears completion.' What do you think of that?"

"A better position? What is it, where is it?"

"Another letter informed me that I had received an appointment to examine and report on the condition of a small branch road just purchased by our railroad; no details, nothing. I was to report to the superintendent at Cenecktady as soon as possible, and he would give me full particulars."

"And what has Mr. Sherwood to do with all this?"

"Mother, that is just the question I have been asking myself."

"Oh! well, Walter, I have known for some time how it would be. With your ability and connections you could not long remain hidden; the opportunity was bound to come. As your poor father used to say, if you do a thing well, you may be sure that in the end people will recognise it and reward you; and I suppose that is what Mr. Sherwood is about to do."

"We will hope so, but it is not the way things are apt to work themselves out in this world."

"Now, Walter, do not you too begin to abuse the world; leave that to Arthur. It is a very good world, and if people would only behave themselves they would find it so."

"And suppose that Mr. Sherwood has some scheme of his own to further in giving me this appointment?"

"Oh, well, in that case, Walter, do try and do just as he tells you. Of course, he is a self-made man, and not quite your equal; but he understands business much better than you and can be of great advantage to you; so do try and please him, there is a dear boy!"

"And suppose what he tells me to do is likely to injure some one else?"

"Oh, well, of course, Walter, I do not want you to injure any one; but really there are two sides to every question, and he would be the best judge in this case. Do not get into Arthur's way of thinking you know better than everybody else. If young people will only do as they are told and not criticise their elders, they are sure to get on, as I am convinced you will."

"Mother, your philosophy is beautiful in its simplicity. I will consider it."

"Thank you, dear. I know I can depend on your doing just the right thing," and at this instant their conversation was brought to an end by the arrival of Arthur and Jeannie on the scene.

Walter was not by any means easy in his mind in

regard to the mysterious new appointment. He thought of it at intervals all that day and the next, and went to bed thinking of it that night. Something restrained him from speaking of it to his cousin on their way home the next day, knowing Arthur's radical views; and indeed the latter was in no sympathetic mood, being entirely taken up in going over his conversation with Jeannie, and very silent in consequence.

Walter, accustomed to his ways, took no notice, and they smoked in silence with an occasional word during the rest of the day.

The next morning, soon after Walter's arrival at the bridge, where he had gone to make arrangements for his speedy departure to Cenecktady, he was not surprised to see approaching Mr. Sherwood on his thoroughbred mare. They bowed, and the latter got off his horse, and throwing the bridle over his arm approached Walter.

"So you are leaving us for Cenecktady, Mr. Coffin?" he said; looking abstractedly at the bridge.

"Yes, I go to-morrow," Walter answered, striving to meet his eye, but failing he went on hurriedly. "I do not know, sir, whether I owe this appointment in any way to you; but if so, I should like to express my thanks."

Mr. Sherwood slowly withdrew his eyes from a contemplation of the bridge to one of his companion's face before answering. "You are very welcome." He paused and Walter could feel himself flush under his scrutiny as he went on, "Yes, I suppose in a way you do owe it to me; I can see that you do your work

well, and I said so; also I noticed that you do not talk about it, and that you are a practical man. I like both qualities, and have use for them. It is this way, Mr. Coffin." He paused again and resumed his study of the bridge. "We have bought this new road," he continued at last, "and an attempt is being made (a very foolish one in my opinion) to have a number of changes made there, which I think will involve large expense and inadequate returns. Reforms are all very well, Mr. Coffin, and reformers most estimable gentlemen; but business is business, and it is the duty of men charged with administering other people's money to do so in an economical way. This I propose to do if possible, and I want a man to report on this matter who is governed by common sense and not by theories and sentiment. Do you understand?" and for the first time he looked Walter in the eyes.

"Perfectly," answered the latter, returning his gaze with pride; but Mr. Sherwood's eyes had now wandered to the river.

"Go to Cenecktady," he continued civilly; "see Mr. Fosdick, the superintendent of the road; talk it over with him, then prepare your report. I have no doubt from what I know of you and the matter at hand that it will accord with my views. Good morning. I wish you a pleasant journey." And he was gone, leaving Walter to say to himself, "Arthur was right; he does require an equivalent. I wonder if it is one that I can pay."

CHAPTER VII

"One that was a woman, Sir, but rest her soul she's dead."

SHAKESPEARE—"Hamlet."

CENECKTADY is one of the beautiful towns once common in the northern part of the State, and now becoming so rare as to tend entirely to disappear, beneath the march of a progress which has converted their streets into a swirling maze of tracks, across which countless vehicles make their way, in an unending throng, like a witches' dance in the Bracken; thus converting their peaceful houses into abodes of terror, where noise incarnate holds sway; while business has transformed the green meadows by their water courses into an impressionist dream, where "hateful sounds" and "horrid sights" contend together; amid a filth that covers all as with a pall.

At the time of Walter's trip to Cenecktady there were only pleasant sights and sounds to charm him. As he alighted from the train he was met, much to his surprise, by a little courtly old gentleman who, glancing hastily along the line of descending passengers, came up to him, saying:

"Am I mistaken in supposing this to be Mr. Coffin—no—my instinct in such matters rarely deceives me. I am Mr. Fosdick, and I thought I would meet you and ask you to stay with me while you are here.

It will afford me the greatest pleasure to have you as my guest."

"Really, Mr. Fosdick," answered Walter, surprised and almost embarrassed at so much kindness from a stranger, "I could not think of inflicting myself upon you in this way. I am sure I should be perfectly comfortable at the hotel."

"Very likely, my young friend; but not, I do not hesitate to say, as comfortable as you would be with me; not another word; I insist; I am only too happy to be of service to any friend of Mr. Sherwood's."

Walter opened his lips to disclaim this friendship, and then shut them again. Why decline hospitality so frankly offered and so graciously given? So he allowed the old gentleman to take full charge of his luggage and to take possession of his bag and his coat and himself; all of which he promptly bundled into a little open wagon which he drove himself, talking the while pleasantly in his cultivated, rather high pitched tones.

The sun was just setting, and the little town was all aglow with light. Its long avenue of elms was just beginning to turn to a vivid crimson, the elm tree worm not having yet begun its ravages among them. The white houses, setting back from the street, on their green lawns, among their fine old trees formed a perfect picture of stately repose. One could imagine the life there to be like the houses, peaceful and dull perhaps, but always dignified, never aimless, never vapid, and with a certain potent charm of its own, like a symphony by Mozart.

Walter watched, well pleased when they stopped

in front of one of these quiet homes and Mr. Fosdick jumped out, hitched his horse to a post at the gate, and walked rapidly across the yard, calling, "Abraham, Abraham!" A little old man, corresponding nicely to his name, suddenly appeared, as if starting from the ground, and quickly taking possession of the horse and carriage and Walter's belongings, conveyed them in a trice to their destined abode. The front door in the meanwhile had been opened by a little old woman, who smiled and nodded at Walter, and taking possession of him instantly conveyed him upstairs to a bedroom which seemed a harmony of old mahogany and glistening white drapery. Its excessive, brilliant cleanliness was so intense, that he found himself wondering where he might lay his things without danger of soiling it. All this was solved by Abraham, who following with them quickly opened a closet in which he deposited them all, saying:

"Is that right, Mother? I have wiped off the dust."

"All right, Father. Dinner is at half-past six, Mr. Coffin, which will give you plenty of time to wash up."

Walter hastened to obey, feeling this to be imperative if he wished to become worthy of his surroundings, and half-past six saw him in the dining-room, his appearance as immaculate in its way as that of the room. Mr. Fosdick did the honours with a courtly, old-fashioned courtesy that could not but charm, and the dinner was fully equal to the promise he had implied. Abraham waited at table, and as

soon as he had retired and they had settled to their cigars, Mr. Fosdick said:

"And now about that road. I am glad Mr. Sherwood has taken the matter in hand, a very sensible man he is, and has a certain old-fashioned common sense that is much needed in these days of change."

"Then I am to infer that you agree with him in regard to the proposed changes?"

"You may, most decidedly, and so would any sensible man. You see this road we have bought, Mr. Coffin, is in perfectly good condition to accomplish the work it is expected to do. Those gentlemen in New York, who have one theory to fit every case, want us to go to work and spend millions to get it in what they call up-to-date condition—meaning by that, I suppose, building a bridge at every crossing, cutting through a mountain to avoid an up-grade, and adopting every kind of modern equipment. Now the question is, would the returns warrant the expense in this case? I say no, Mr. Coffin, most decidedly and emphatically, no!"

"Really," Walter answered, smiling, "you make out so good a case that you will not have the slightest trouble in convincing me; but would it not be as well, before you do, that I should see the road?"

"Perfectly correct, Mr. Coffin, quite proper that you should see for yourself before forming an opinion; it is what I should advise myself; it is the only rational way to judge; and from what I see of you, I am sure you cannot fail to judge correctly. My instinct seldom fails me in such matters."

"Thank you," answered Walter.

"And now having settled our business, let us go in the other room and enjoy ourselves."

He suited the action to the word, and they adjourned to the other room. There was a bright fire on the hearth, and in front of it stood two easy chairs beside a table on which was a lamp and the evening papers. Mr. Fosdick's boast about comfort was certainly proving correct. They sat down and the old gentleman took up a paper and glanced through it, while Walter looked about him. As he did so, his eye became attracted by the sight of a photograph on the mantel between the mahogany clock and the old-fashioned candelabra. It was the picture of a very young girl in evening dress, and something vaguely familiar about the face caused Walter to examine it more carefully; and as he did so, Mr. Fosdick exclaimed, "I see you are looking at the picture of my little Jeannie."

"So it is really she," Walter said, surprised and pleased. "I thought I could not be mistaken, and yet it seemed strange that you two should be acquainted. I saw her just before I came here."

"Saw her? Ah! no. I am sorry to say there is a mistake. My Jeannie is dead."

"Dead! Why, I met her day before yesterday."

"Impossible. I see now there is a mistake. Jeannie Fulton, the daughter of my old friend Richard Fulton, died five years ago this autumn."

"Strange," murmured Walter again, looking at the picture, "I should have sworn they were the same, but the Jeannie I know is Jeannie Caxton, and she is very much alive, I can assure you."

"She may be a relative," the old gentleman said musingly. "I remember Jeannie's mother's name was Caxton. She may be a cousin—I cannot say, as her mother was from another town. Whoever she is, I wish her well, if only for her resemblance to my dear little Jeannie."

"You were her father's friend?"

"Yes, and hers, too; and would have been more so had she but trusted me; would have helped her and believed in her through it all; but you young people, my boy, are of a different generation and have different ways, and it is hard for us to understand one another, whatever may be the good will on both sides."

"I trust I have not brought up a painful subject," answered Walter, with a burning desire to hear more, which his good breeding alone enabled him to suppress.

"Not at all, not at all, my young friend. There is still a certain pleasure to me in talking about my little Jeannie, though it will not bring her back again, nor her dear father either, who was my best friend."

"Tell me something of them if you feel able to do so," said Walter, "and it will interest me, for they may be relatives of my friend."

Mr. Fosdick cleared his throat and lighted a fresh cigar, puffing it slowly and meditatively, as if it assisted him to collect his wandering thoughts.

"The subject is a very sad one," he said, at last, "and I should hardly speak to you about it were the story not known to so many that I had rather you

should hear it from me, for I want you to do justice to my little Jeannie. I can see her now as she was when that picture was taken; such a young thing, Mr. Coffin, barely twenty, and to die so soon and under such a load of grief."

He paused and smoked in silence for a minute, and when he began again his voice was cheerful as before; his mind had reverted to the past, and as always with him it was the pleasant, not the painful, side of that past that lingered most.

"Yes," he said, "she was twenty when that picture was taken, and so gay and bright, poor little child, and unwitting what was to befall her! I had known for some time that her father was in difficulties (he was a merchant), and had helped him all I could, both with money and advice; but they were thrown away; the best fellow in the world, Mr. Coffin, but one of your impracticable men who seem to think you can make a stock sell at par just by willing it to do so. Well, I need not go into the whole matter; he was as reputable a man as ever breathed, and when the crash came he met with much sympathy. I was present at the meeting of his creditors, where he gave an account of everything, and ended by handing us a list of his property with the words, 'Take it and save what you can for yourselves.' The next day we met again at his house to receive a transfer of his securities. I shall never forget my feelings when we entered that room and saw his safe open and the papers strewn about, while we heard that he lay upstairs dying, stricken down with apoplexy. I went up to him at once, but I hardly think he knew

me though he made an effort to speak. When I returned I found an examination had been made of the securities in the safe, and that ten of the bonds were missing; and then I learned at last that his daughter, too, had disappeared."

"Jeannie!"

"Yes, my boy, Jeannie, and it was that discovery that must have stricken down my poor friend. They found him lying there by the open safe, and he never spoke again."

"And the bonds?"

"They traced them to New York where they had been sold, through a broker, by some one answering to her description, and they also traced her on board a ship bound for Europe; but that was all. If she had written to her father he had destroyed the letter, and he was unable to explain."

"And they never heard of her again?"

"Not till the news of her death came some years later. Some of the creditors were very bitter, and instituted proceedings against her, and they made every effort to trace her but in vain. There was also an attempt made to prove collusion with her father, but it of course remained unproved."

"What could have been her motive?"

"Alas, poor child, to me her motive was only too plain. I never blamed her; she knew nothing of money, nor of business. She probably did not realise what she did, and with a girl like that a man can do anything."

"Then there was a man?"

"Of course. Is there not always a man where a

woman is to blame? She met him, I was told, while visiting some friends at a University town the year before, where he went to attend a football game. He was a stranger, and I do not even remember his name; for it was supposed the one he went by was an assumed one, and it has escaped me."

"Then you did not see him?"

"I did not even know of his existence until later, when I learned that he had several times been on here to see her, and that much against her father's wishes. I never doubted that it was he who took the bonds, or prevailed on her to do so, and that it was to shield him that she kept silent and bore the blame herself. As far as we know, she left here alone and went alone to the other side, and I have supposed that by that time she discovered what he was and broke with him. I made every attempt to communicate with her, but in vain; and I do not know to this day when she heard of her father's illness and death."

"But those friends where you say she met this man?"

"Had moved away and gone abroad. She may have joined them; I cannot say."

Walter had fallen to musing.

"So no one really knows what became of her?"

"No one; she vanished utterly. She could not have returned here because of the judgment against her; she would have been arrested on coming to this country; but she might have written, and it seems strange that she did not, very strange."

"Yes, it is certainly very strange," said Walter, and he added, "and very sad as well," and fell into a brown study.

"Never mind," said the little old gentleman rousing himself. "I did not mean to sadden you, and I also have risen above it. To me she still remains my little Jeannie, as she looks in that picture, and I think of her and her father as they used to be, and will be again in another and better world, I trust." And he, too, fell to musing of the days gone by.

Walter retired that night in a frame of mind that surprised himself, for to the perplexity which Mr. Fosdick's story had aroused in him was added a feeling of vague foreboding, which made him long yet dread to put it to the test. As he went over again and again every point of it in detail, it seemed to him at the same time incredible and highly probable, and at one moment it explained much that was dark in Jeannie's conduct, and at another filled it with still further gloom, while through it all he seemed to hear his mother's shrewd voice saying doubtfully: "Are you sure she is respectable," and he was no longer able to reply.

Two decisions at length emerged to him from this chaos of conflicting thoughts and emotions; one, that Arthur must know and judge for himself, and the other, that for the present he himself could not.

"I will put it out of my mind until later," he thought. "There is too much for me here at stake,"—and upon that he went to sleep.

The next day and the next saw him hard at work,

examining, comparing, observing, judging the condition of the road. After about a week of this he suddenly realised, what he had from the first foreseen, that the whole matter resolved itself into a question of judgment. Here was the road in fair condition; what should be done, modernise it at once and stand the loss now—or wait? There was as much to be said on one side as the other, and the result really depended on contingencies which neither party could foresee. Walter's disposition naturally inclined him to the conservative one, which was Mr. Sherwood's; that his interest also tended in that direction filled him with thankfulness rather than perplexity; for over-conscientiousness was certainly not among Walter's failings, except as regarded his work.

He took great pains with the report, and went into everything much in detail, explaining his reasons with the more care because they tended to confirm Mr. Sherwood's conclusions, except in one particular, where he took equal pains to enforce his own view. It was in regard to some necessary repairs upon a bridge, and he felt such a delightful sense of impartiality in doing this that in the end he had almost persuaded himself that the entire report was dictated by the same feeling. This sense of exhilaration was confirmed rather than allayed by Mr. Fosdick's comments upon it. The little old gentleman was enchanted with Walter and inclined to greet his report with a perfect pæon of praise.

"Does you infinite credit, my young friend, infinite credit! I could not have improved on it myself. It is rare that we find so much strength of mind and

impartiality allied to such close reasoning in one so young. I am delighted, Mr. Coffin, perfectly delighted, and so doubtless Mr. Sherwood will be!" And they parted with mutual expressions of thankfulness and esteem.

CHAPTER VIII

"God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her."

ROBERT BROWNING—"One Word More."

MR. SHERWOOD expressed himself in somewhat the same fashion, though in a manner that was hardly so satisfactory to Walter's opinion of his own disinterestedness.

"It is a very good report indeed," he said, "careful, painstaking, and fitted to withstand criticism. I commend particularly that portion of it about the bridge which, as calculated to prove impartiality, is really a very clever stroke, very. I could not improve on it myself and will see that it is acted upon," and he shook hands civilly with Walter, who left him feeling, it must be confessed, a little flat.

He had made his visit to Mr. Sherwood on the afternoon of his return from Cenecktady, and had been informed by the butler, on his arrival, that the ladies were not at home, so that he feared to have no further opportunity of saying good-bye to Isabel.

The house-party having broken up, a few other guests had been invited to aid in amusing Jack, and rendering his stay, in his father's house, more diverting to him. As Walter left, he could hear the sound of balls, in the billiard room, telling how some of the party were employed; but he was too much occu-

pied with his own thoughts to give it much attention. The autumn mist was about him as he descended the hill. It crept in upon him until it mingled with the landscape, and he could hardly distinguish it from the dusk itself; a thin fine haze, so soft and transparent that the dead leaves which floated down from the trees seemed to form a part of it, and to suffuse everything with a silvery yellow glow. The rank luxuriance of summer still lingered in the undergrowth; a riot of plant life which the Hudson alone gives and which remains until the frost cuts it down. All the autumn flowers were there in profusion; chrysanthemums and cosmos grew rampant in the borders, and along the roadsides goldenrod and Michaelmas daisies fairly smothered each other, in an expiring effort at bloom. Everywhere was a kind of glorified decay—such a decay as comes to a nation just before its greatness has passed—everywhere a golden haze; a rank growth; the end of a summer dream.

This thought was in Walter's mind as a light step sounded beside him, and Isabel herself came out of a wooded path to the left of the lodge, accompanied by Bennie and his two small cousins, heading a troop of dogs of all sizes.

"So you are back," she said, with her usual directness, giving him her hand. "I thought you had gone for good."

"I went away for a few days on business, and left a message for you and Miss Sherwood, apologising for not calling before I left. I have just been doing so now."

"Well, stop and make your visit here if you have time. The children and I are going to have tea at the Fairy Spring."

"Will you come, too, Mr. Coffin?" asked Bennie pleadingly, and Walter willingly consented.

The "Fairy Spring" was at no great distance across the road in a little dale, overlooking the river, surrounded on three sides by a thick growth of dog-wood, which the autumn frosts had already changed to a brilliant crimson hue.

"I do not see any spring or any fairies," said Walter, looking about him.

"You would see both on a mid-summer evening," answered Isabel, pointing to a tiny spring, bubbling up between two rocks, in the centre of a circle, which looked as if it might well have been made by fairy feet. "Bennie has seen them."

"Really, Bennie?"

"Yes, I did see them last summer in the moonlight, when I was looking for Toodles. They had hair like Mamma and feet that twinkled like stars; but I did not stop to count them."

"Bennie is like me," said his mother, seating herself and taking off her hat. "I too saw fairies, when I was his age."

"Did you really, Aunt Isabel?" asked the youngest of the Grey children—a girl—looking at her with dilated eyes. "What lovely things you used to do! I do not think," plaintively, "that Mamma would let me see fairies. I am almost sure she would say they were bad for children."

"More than likely; but now go and get ready your

tea and perhaps the fairies may help you to eat it. Poor little things," she added, turning to Walter as the children hurried away, "think what they are deprived of! Now, Bennie's life is still full of romance; even if later he must give it up."

He did not answer for a moment and she followed the direction of his eyes towards the river, where the mist was still rolling in, a thick mass of vapour streaked underneath by lightning flashes of sunlight—and these would spread and glow and break the clouds asunder, much as a fire does a blinding smoke—until at last a pale white ball would appear, show for a moment, and then be swallowed up again in a thick cloudy vapour. Only its edges, as they lay against the water, gleamed so fiercely that their reflection could be seen, to be succeeded by the reflection of the cloud which at last overshadowed them. The river was perfectly still, except for a soft ground swell, which moved to and fro as noiselessly as the wind among the trees; so that the little black waves swayed and curled and broke like leaves in a south wind. At last Walter asked as though involuntarily:

"Must he give it up?"

She looked her astonishment.

"What an extraordinary question from you, who are the most practical of men! Why, of course he must give it up; but it will not be any harder in the end because it has made his youth happy."

"May not a remnant make the rest of his life happy too?"

Walter was again surprised at himself, and could hardly believe that it was he who was giving utter-

ance to this sentiment, while into Isabel's eyes there leaped a curious gleam of light, which vanished as she answered:

"Most unlikely, for you know perfectly that the sooner one gets to look on things as they are, instead of as one wishes them to be, the more apt one is to enjoy life, because one expects less." She paused and gazed beyond Walter at the river, and her face softened again as she went on: "With children it is different, and I feel like giving them every reasonable wish, so that they may be able to look back and remember what it was to be happy."

Walter's eyes were still fixed upon the river, where the sun had now entirely disappeared behind the mountains; but something of its light seemed to have passed into the water, and glowed and burned there until each little dark wave twinkled like the stars on a winter's night.—As she finished he turned and looked at her, and again he was struck by the expression of her eyes. What did that look mean, and why did it strike him as so oddly pathetic and inconsistent with her face? But in a moment it was gone, and there was nothing there but a wayward friendliness as she asked in her abrupt manner,

"Did you go away on business of my father-in-law's?"

Walter was startled into answering bluntly, "Yes."

"I thought he had his eye on you. Well, he can be of use to you, great use if—"

"If what—"

"If you are not afraid of him. Most people are, and then he despises them! He is all right if you keep a cool head and a steady hand; but if not, woe to you! What is it, Bennie, is tea ready?"

"Yes, Mamma, and we thought you and Mr. Coffin—"

"Might like some; so we should amazingly. I am answering for myself. How about you, Mr. Coffin?"

A few minutes ago, Walter could not have conceived of himself as taking part in this repast; but he was destined to surprise himself still more by doing so, not only without aversion, but with positive relish. Long afterwards he remembered the scene; the pale autumn twilight lengthening their shadows on the grass, the group of children gathered about their pastoral meal, and she seated by the fairy spring, with the light just gilding her fair head, and still showing faintly that changing anxious look in her eyes.

CHAPTER IX

"The brands were flat, the brands were dying
Amid their own white ashes lying;
But when the lady passed there came
A tongue of light, a fit of flame."

COLERIDGE—"Christabel."

IT was a windy, bleak autumn day when Walter returned to New York; one of those days which eat into your bones and rasp your nerves and fill your eyes with dust and your throat with microbes;—one of those days, only too frequent, when the air depresses instead of bracing you; when the sun no longer cheers you, and life seems a hollow mockery of wasted endeavour, instead of a noble opportunity for great deeds. Such a day, in short, which occurs too often with every one, when the wind blows from the East.

Walter was not insensible to its influence. He was to spend some weeks with his mother before seeking further employment, and it seemed to him that the part of town in which she lived had never before looked so desolate. It was a fine old house, in what had once been a fine old street on the lower East side, but business had already invaded its once cloistered solitude, filling it with the atmosphere which it represents, viz.: dirt, noise, and ugliness. Mrs. Coffin and her widowed sister Mrs. Crane had clung

to the house through good and evil report, and for them it still preserved the aroma of aristocratic if faded gentility, which they loved.

Walter loved it, too, in his own way, and that enabled him to see with regret its wasted opportunities. Mrs. Coffin's artistic nature was of the sort represented by the table cloth she was embroidering, and her house represented it also. How she could contrive to place such handsome furniture, against such a dignified background, with such detestable results, is a mystery which only she and her sister could have solved, and to them it was no mystery at all.

Mrs. Crane was a smaller, slighter, weaker, paler edition of her sister, and filled no other position, either in her own or others' eyes, than that of foil when the latter was present. To Walter, she had a certain gentle, plaintive charm, like a melody in the minor key which is but a feeble variation of the hardier major theme which has preceded it.

"Well, my son," Mrs. Coffin said, cheerfully welcoming him in the hall, "and how are you? Is it not really quite a providential thing which brings you home just in time for the church fair?"

"So there is a fair, is there, Mother? If I had known that I should have stayed away; but it cannot be helped now."

"You are rather horrid, Walter; but fortunately, I know you do not mean it. The reason I am glad you are home is that we want a tall man to help decorate the hall. We want the hall to look well for the fair; and the church step-ladder is very shaky;

and the rector is short; and some of the ladies of the Committee rather timid. I am thankful to say I am not. However, now you are here, it does not so much matter. You will help us, and so will Arthur; and Jeannie has painted a picture—an exquisite thing, Walter, Venus and Adonis—a copy of course—which is to be raffled for, and is to decorate the hall meanwhile, trimmed with garlands, you know, quite a Greek effect.”

“And does the Rector approve, of the picture I mean, and the raffling, and the Greek effect?”

“The Rector approves of anything, my son, which raises money for the church; anything not vitally wrong, of course.”

“I understand. And how did you get Jeannie and Arthur interested, and how are they, bye the bye?”

“Very well; and they are each interested because I told one the other was; quite a little deception on my part, Walter; but harmless, do you not think?”

“Like the Rector’s raffled picture of Venus! Yes, Mother, I see; and where do I come in, besides being tall, of course.”

“Well, I thought, Walter, you would not mind going over to Jeannie’s to-night and bringing back the picture. It will save us the price of a carriage, and Jeannie of course would not trust it to an ordinary messenger.”

“No, of course not, and it will be so nice of you, Walter, if you will help us,” echoed Mrs. Crane, appearing at that minute and cheerfully embracing her nephew.

So it was settled, and after dinner Walter betook himself to see Jeannie.

Jeannie lived above Twenty-third Street on the East side, in a house which is still standing and has long been associated with artists and an atmosphere of art. Those words, when applied to a place on the other side, are apt, correctly or not, to awaken picturesque associations; while here, in many cases, they stand for an untidy, careless squalor, as different from the first as a wild garden of naturalised flowers is to a neglected barnyard. The latter may contain beauty, but it is not there in harmony with its surroundings.

So with Jeannie's residence. Walter entered a tall, badly proportioned building—flanked on one side by a dirty warehouse, and on the other by a foul-smelling stable—and stumbled up several flights of particularly dark, steep stairs, finally knocking at the door on a landing which seemed suddenly to appear and stop his progress to the floor above.

"Come in," Jeannie's voice said, and he entered.

The studio was a low, rather untidy room, crowded with pictures; some on the floor, some—the latter covered—standing about on easels. A few chairs and a sofa and table completed the furniture, while several handsome pieces of brocade and embroidery helped to give it a more cheerful aspect. There was a coal fire in the grate, and upon it Arthur Hinsdale was occupied in trying to boil water in a rather dilapidated kettle. Jeannie sat beside him busily engaged in smoking a cigarette, and two other figures could be faintly discerned through a cloud of tobacco smoke.

"Heavens!" said Walter to himself, "what would my mother say?"

"Well, Walter," Jeannie said, extending her hand without rising, "help yourself to one of Arthur's cigars, and tell us how you are. Mr. Artist and Mr. Painter, this is my old friend Walter Coffin; an Englishman, I hasten to add, lest you make some foolish joke about them."

The two young men—artist friends of Jeannie's—bowed in precisely the same manner and uttered almost similar greetings. Walter could see immediately that they were negligible quantities.

"I have just returned from Cenecktady," he answered, seating himself and lighting a cigarette. "That is your home town, is it not?" He looked at her through the cloud of smoke which he blew, and Jeannie looked back at him.

"No, I am from farther north," she said at last.

"I stayed with a Mr. Fosdick," Walter went on, his eyes still on her. "Do you happen to have heard of him? No? He had a photograph of a girl, which I took at first for you, until he startled me by saying that she was dead. Then I found it was a picture of Jeannie Fulton, whom we concluded must be a relative of yours because her mother's name was Caxton."

"She was a cousin, I believe," Jeannie answered quietly, "but a very distant one. I never saw her."

"Then you do not know her story," went on Walter, still looking at her. "It is a sad one."

"A story about a cousin of Jeannie's?" said Arthur, glancing up from the kettle where the water still refused to boil. "Let us have it."

"Wait till your punch is ready, Artie—I conclude that is what the water is for," Walter answered, "and I will tell it. It is somewhat in your line."

"In my line how? As a poet?" he asked, lifting the cover to look at the bubbles.

"No, as a righter of wrongs."

The two artist friends had drawn their chairs nearer, scenting the punch and a mystery; Arthur took the kettle from the fire and began his preparations. Walter got up and began to walk about the room, watching him; Jeannie alone sat as she had done from the first, still smoking her cigarette.

"There," Arthur said at last, adding his final touches to the steaming drink, which he had mixed in Jeannie's wash basin. "There, now, good people, fall to, and let us drink first to Jeannie, her happiness and success," and he raised his glass, calling out joyously, "To Jeannie," and the others did likewise. "And now, Walter," he finished, turning to his cousin, "for your story."

Walter came forward, and as he did so Jeannie took her glass, which so far had remained untouched, and drained it. Then she lighted another cigarette, while Arthur still watched her happily and Walter watched them both.

The fire which until then had burned low now flared up suddenly, and it seemed to him that one burning red coal, reflected in Jeannie's eyes, drew out an answering spark. He watched with a kind of fascination the hand, which held her cigarette, and the supple fingers, plump yet square tipped, which the firelight showed. What they held they kept, that

was what those fingers expressed, and Walter's eyes hardened as they followed the wreaths of smoke curling upward from her lips. Again the coal glowed and he saw the shadow of her hand as it grew and deepened and assumed enormous proportions on the wall, while the smoke, like a spectral serpent, curled in wreaths about it. Out of the shadows of the room there seemed to creep a spirit of evil, a dim foreboding of something sinister and grim, which filled them all against their will with a sickening sense of fear.

And then Walter told his story—and somehow as he told it, the people who listened became infected with his own feeling, and listened, eagerly, breathlessly, not as one listens to an account of another's woe but as of something which concerned them each; something which racked their nerves and gripped their hearts and forced them to read beneath its commonplace words the real tragedy of a young wasted life; the still greater tragedy of an old man, robbed of all, save honour, and deserted by the daughter who should have been the first to glory in him. At last as Walter paused nothing was said for a moment, and then Arthur murmured softly:

"Poor old man dying alone! You were right, Walter. I should like to avenge him, not on the girl, but on the man. Perhaps I may meet him some day and do so—who knows?"

Walter did not reply; he was smoking silently watching Jeannie, and the two young artist friends were watching them. "Well," said the former, looking up and throwing the end of her cigarette into

the fire, as if dismissing it and all painful subjects together, "we have had enough of tragedy for to-night, even if the heroine is a relative of my own. Thank you, Walter, for a most thrilling tale! Thank you, Arthur, for a very delicious punch! And now let us turn to comedy again and be cheerful." And she rose and stood by the fire, warming her hands at the blaze.

"We must go," said the two young artists. "We have an engagement for Mrs. Blake's musicale, and so have you, Arthur. Have you forgotten?"

Arthur hesitated, glancing at his cousin, but Jeannie said decidedly:

"I have business to settle with Walter, which he has apparently forgotten, though I have not. I have promised his mother a picture for the fair, and he has come for it. Go at once to your musicale." And they took their departure, Arthur still looking lingeringly back towards the pair he left together.

"I was mistaken," Walter thought, standing with his back to the fire, in deep thought, while she walked with the rest to the door. "I was mistaken, after all," and the next minute he felt rather than heard that Jeannie was now beside him and that she was saying in a low, tense but metallic voice,

"How dare you, Walter Coffin! How dare you stand in my presence and tell that story, knowing it to be my own!"

The shock was so great; Jeannie's transformation was so sudden that Walter stood before her, staring dumbly as if turned to stone.

"Oh! I know you," she went on in the same hard,

even tones, "and it is like you to do what you have done. Arthur would have waited; would have given me the benefit of the doubt; would have examined further; but you, you condemn me unheard, quietly, remorselessly, as one of your own machines, whom you are like." And as he still did not answer she went on still more harshly:

"I know why you are doing this; you want to take Arthur away; to turn him against me; the one person who believes in me; my only friend;" and as she spoke, her voice broke at last, and she sat down at the table, leaning her arms upon it, and her head upon them, with a low wailing sob of bitter despair.

For a moment, Walter felt too crushed and conscience stricken to speak; at last approaching the table he laid his hand upon her head, saying with a gentleness she had never heard from him, before,

"Forgive me, Jeannie. I am sorry."

She raised her head, taking the hand he had laid on it and pressing it to her cheek, as she said between her sobs:

"I will tell you everything, Walter, and you shall judge whether I have been most sinned against or sinning," and then Jeannie told him her story.

CHAPTER X

"Out of this nettle danger, we pluck this flower safety."

"King Henry IV."

MR. AND MRS. GREY lived in a large dull house, in a long dull street west of Fifth Avenue, in what was then considered the smart part of the town. Everything about it was expensive, cheerless and fashionable, and Catherine felt thoroughly satisfied with her surroundings. In fact, barring the care and anxiety which constantly beset her, she felt thoroughly satisfied with her lot, though not so shrouded in self importance as either of her sisters.

Jack Sherwood had always preferred her to them, as nearer his age, and less disposed to manage him; for outside her own family Catherine was not inclined to interfere; being too absorbed with her children to have much leisure to criticise her friends. Jack's family affection, therefore, centred in her, and he occasionally stopped in to see her on his way up town, choosing an hour when the children were at their supper, and he felt sure of her undivided attention. Mrs. Grey enjoyed these visits, for she liked her brother, and liked also this reminder of her old life, when she, too, had interests outside her family circle.

Some weeks after the events last related, she sat expecting him one afternoon, her face looking in

the light of the fire almost young and pretty, when freed for a moment from the careworn expression which disfigured it. Her husband was with her, warming his feet by the fire and complaining of the cold, for unfortunately Ned Grey was apt with such complaints, as feeling more acutely than most people the ordinary annoyances of life.

"This room is very draughty, Catherine," he said. "You should do something to prevent it, for there is nothing I dislike so much as a draught."

"So do I; but as yesterday you complained of the heat—"

"You thought I ought to be frozen to-day! That is like a woman. Yesterday there was too much fire, and there is nothing I dislike so much,— Now to-day there is too little. You are always in extremes."

"How are you, Catherine? Dear me, how warm it is in here!" said Jack, entering in time to stop further melancholy reminiscences.

"How are you, Jack? Yes, it seems warm to me; but Ned was just complaining of the draught. Take this seat, dear, away from the window, and let me ring for a hot drink; you have evidently taken cold."

"Nonsense; he has evidently done nothing of the kind. He wants his hot drink, just as I do," and she almost cheered under the influence of his engaging smile.

"Any news, Jack?" she asked, after they had settled down again.

"No—yes," he answered, his face clouding. "That is, I just stopped in for a moment at Margaret's, to see Corning about a horse, and there was that

fellow Hinsdale again, in deep consultation with her. I do wish, Catherine, if you have any influence, you would put a stop to that intimacy. I very much object to Arthur Hinsdale."

"Do you, Jack? I am so sorry because that would be just enough, as you know, to make Margaret like him all the better. She is so very set in her ways!"

"What in the world she sees in him I cannot imagine! A Socialist, poet, and reformer combined! Can you imagine anything more obnoxious?"

"Well," said Catherine, seating herself comfortably and taking up an afghan she was knitting, "that is bad. I do not know anything about his poetry, for I never read it, but as for the rest, I think you must be mistaken, Jack. I am sure he cannot be a reformer. The Lancys have always been such a well-known family that it is unlikely that he would take up with anything of the kind."

"Lucky Margaret does not hear you!"

"Oh! Well, Margaret is a woman, and has no children, poor thing, so she may be excused if she busies herself in that way; but a man!"

"Well, I wish you would stop it, Catherine, at any rate, for I do not like him at all. I tell you candidly it is very annoying to me to have my sisters mixed up with him in any way."

"Why do you dislike him so, Jack?" asked his brother-in-law, perversely desirous of taking the other side. "I met him at Margaret's, and thought him a very agreeable and entertaining man. What if he is a reformer; a man must live!"

"Well, I had just as soon he did not live by mak-

ing capital out of my faults and those of my class," answered the young millionaire haughtily. "There is too much of that kind of thing going on, and it is time it was stopped once for all!"

"Really, Jack, if it is as bad as all that, why not speak to my father," said Catherine, placidly knitting, "and ask him to forbid Margaret from having anything more to do with the young man? Even she dare not go against that."

"Suppose you make the suggestion. It would come better from you than from me," said Jack insinuatingly. "Women understand that sort of thing so well, and Elizabeth would back you up any time, you know she would, in a matter like this."

"Well, Jack, I do not mind trying if you really wish it, but I cannot promise it will do any good. Father is hard to rouse, and Margaret is so perverse that the more you say against any one, the more she likes them. However, I will do what I can," and so the matter was left.

When Jack Sherwood left his sister's he kept on his way up the avenue to his own house,—in a side street—a pretty, bright house which Catherine considered unfashionable and Elizabeth untidy and Margaret uncomfortable; but which just suited Isabel. It was her pleasure to live amid light cheerful surroundings, and in that period of riotous colour schemes there was something about the gay simplicity of her decorations which made them peculiarly refreshing and pleasant.

Jack was not in a mood that evening to appreciate them. To his jaded nature the slightest opposition

was often sufficient to arouse his latent irritability, and on this occasion he objected to many things; to Arthur Hinsdale; to Margaret for favouring him; and to his wife because, on entering the drawing-room, she commented upon his mood.

Isabel, who had just come in, was looking over some letters, and as he entered she exclaimed:

"What is it, Jack?"

"What is what? I wish, Isabel, you would say what you mean and not ask absurd questions."

"Nor should I were it not that you came in like Hamlet, after he had seen his father's ghost. I thought something terrible must have happened."

"And if it had I suppose you would make fun of it just the same," he answered moodily, throwing himself into one of the comfortable arm chairs and leaning his head back wearily.

"Now you know that is not so," answered his wife. "I am as sympathetic as it is possible for a woman to be who has not an inkling of what it is all about. What is it, for Heaven's sake, that has made you look so glum?"

"I do not look glum at all," Jack answered crossly, "except in your eyes, where I am certain of always appearing in the wrong."

No reply this time, which was certainly hard on Jack, as giving him nothing to find fault with. He was not, however, entirely discouraged by the fact.

"Where do we go to-night?" he asked, opening his eyes long enough to receive further aggravation from her look of unconcern.

"To the opera with the Farnums."

"I never could endure them; they are so musical. What opera is it?"

"Lohengrin."

"Now, you know perfectly, Isabel, how I hate that thing! I said the last time I heard it that I would never go again, and yet here you have made another engagement for me without my consent."

"I asked you before accepting the Farnums' invitation."

"But you did not say what the opera was to be."

"Because I did not know."

"Why not ask them before getting me in such a scrape?"

"Because they invited us two weeks ago and did not know themselves."

"And a fool's trick it is to ask us two weeks ahead for a thing like that," went on Jack, intent on his grievance. "Now I must sit through a whole evening listening to music I detest, or talking to people I hate."

"If you feel that way I will telephone Mrs. Farnum that you are not well enough to come. You will not be a desirable guest in your present mood."

"And what shall I do with myself, pray, while you are at the opera? I have nothing else on hand and am dead sick of the club. No, I shall go. Who else is to be there?"

"The Fentons, I believe."

"Why could you not say that at once? I like Mrs. Fenton, she is a very pretty woman; and we will leave early."

"Very well," answered his wife, intent on her letters.

Jack's irritability did not annoy her as it once had, because she understood it and knew it was as fitful and transient as everything else about him, and as little likely to last. He was all smiles now and made himself most agreeable on their way to dinner, so that his wife, looking at him idly, wondered what had been the cause of his outburst. He certainly had looked very much upset, and it did not seem to her that dislike for Wagner's music quite accounted for the fact. However, their arrival at Mrs. Farnum's put the matter out of her mind for the time being,—especially as the scene was no unusual one between them. Jack was often tired and out of sorts, and in these moods his wife was sometimes able to cheer him, her boundless, physical energy acting as a kind of moral spur, so that for the time being, he felt himself to be taking part with her in some of the useful work of the world. There are people who possess the power to communicate this bounding spirit of life, of hope, of interest in things outside themselves; and Isabel was one. When in her presence, the weariest toiler in the social whirl; the most jaded votary of pleasure or sated refugee of dissipation, felt a faint stirring of life; and caught glimpses of hidden possibilities of energy, answering to those within her breast. She might be broken, restless and despairing; but she would never be without courage to bear her own grief, or sympathy for those of others. Hence her power, at once to encourage and inspire.

Mrs. Farnum, pretty, æsthetic and fashionable, prided herself as much on her artistic proclivities as on her social position or the cut of her gown. Her one aim was to be smartly Bohemian, and she derived as much pleasure from this ideal as if it were possible of realisation.

She came forward now with a charming frown to greet them.

"You are late, Isabel, and I have been worried. I counted on getting to the opera in time for the overture. When I do not hear it my whole evening is spoiled; it is as if I had missed my bath in the morning."

"It is Jack's fault," answered Isabel, "and I believe he kept me on purpose. He prefers to have you late at this opera."

"Why, Mr. Sherwood!"

"I hate Wagner in general and Lohengrin in particular," said that young gentleman politely.

"Not really? You cannot be such a barbarian. Now I live upon his music! To me it would take the place of food any day."

"I hope," ventured her husband, "that you have provided something else for us to-night."

"I am frankly hungry," said pretty Mrs. Fenton.

"So am I," answered Jack, quite restored to good humour, and they went in to dinner.

CHAPTER XI

"Oh woman, woman!—Thou art the author
Of such a book of follies in a man,
That it would need the tears of all the angels
To blot the record out!"

BULWER LYTTON—"The Lady of Lyons."

AT the Opera that evening the orchestra was just tuning up to begin. From every side sounded the shrill insistent buzzing of the violins; the mellow boom of the wind instruments; the harsh clang of the brass; so that the very air itself was charged with sound. From every side rose waves of heat as well, and the two seemed to mingle and melt into each other until it became impossible to distinguish them apart, and they hung at last over the stage like clouds before a coming storm. People gathered steadily, for it was a favourite opera, and Jean de Reszke was going to sing. The galleries were already crowded with corpulent musical Germans; the orchestra seats were filling rapidly with opulent Israelites and smart music lovers; and even the boxes showed a faint sprinkling of blasé faces, looking out with dawning interest, to where the outer curtain was just beginning to rise.

On the third row of the middle aisle, two seats from the end, sat Arthur Hinsdale and his cousin; Arthur a little glum and sulky because the musical

friend, to whom he owed the tickets had sent them so late that afternoon that Jeannie had already an engagement, and he had been obliged to fall back on Walter instead.

The latter was equally silent, though hardly so serious, for it happened that the seat where he sat commanded a view of the Farnums' box and that the Farnums were early after all. He therefore obtained a good view of Isabel, as she entered just ahead of the others, and standing for a moment, slowly glanced about the house. As he watched her through his glasses and the strong electric light fell full upon her face, it brought out more clearly than ever the strange expression in her eyes; and while he looked spellbound, and the first note of the music sounded out its warning call, in an instant their meaning flashed on him—*that expression was dread!* The shock of this conviction so startled him that he dropped his glasses with a crash, and oblivious of Arthur's angry frown, he sat there staring dully at the stage; while the music rose and swelled and rose again; seeming to mingle with and make clear the look in those eyes, interpreting them, answering, revealing their meaning, until Walter's very soul was carried away; but whether by the music or by Isabel, he would have found it difficult to express.

At the beginning of the intermission he rose and turned to Arthur.

"I am going up to speak to Mrs. Sherwood. Will you come with me?"

"Thank you, no," answered Arthur. "I do not like Jack Sherwood and I do not want to destroy

the effect of that last act." And he sank into a brown study which his cousin did not think it necessary to disturb. He met Jack as he entered the box and was civilly received; for Jack did not at all connect him with Arthur and had agreeable recollections of a discussion on big game at Erncliffe.

"How are you, Coffin?" he said. "Glad to see you in town. You must come over and dine some night and tell me more of your experiences in South Africa. Isabel will arrange it."

Isabel appeared to have taken over her husband's mood of some hours before and received him with a lack of her usual abrupt cordiality.

"It is a fine performance, do you not think?" Walter said for the sake of saying something.

"Yes—no. I really did not notice. The orchestral part means so much to me that it completely effaces the performers. Of course De Reszke is always fine; but I hate to visualise Lohengrin, or any hero," she finished, looking up with her first smile.

"The strongest thing to me in the opera is the note of warning with which it begins; the motive of dread running through it!" he answered, as he watched her, full of the impression which he had received.

"Yes. I felt it so to-night, especially; something menacing, intangible. Perhaps a warning to Elsa, as to every woman, not to accept love or happiness without inquiry. As soon as she began to examine into the life of this man her faith was gone and love went with it."

The words were uttered sincerely and simply, as a

statement of fact, not a sentiment to trifle with, and Walter was startled into answering in the same tone.

"But there are honest men, just as there are honest women, and their honour is none the less to be relied on because it is so different."

She looked up at him for a minute, and her eyes fell as she answered, "Perhaps," and at that instant there was an inroad into the box and her husband touched her on the shoulder as Walter rose.

"Have you anything on for to-morrow, Isabel? I want Mr. Coffin to dine with us and tell me more of his exploring trip. I may hunt big game myself some day."

"To-morrow? No, thank Heaven, we dine at home. I hope you will come, Mr. Coffin, at half-past seven."

Walter accepted, and bowed and left the box; but all through the opera he seemed to hear her voice saying:

"Her faith was gone and love went with it," and it seemed a fitting refrain to the music at the end.

"Well, Walter," Arthur said to him on their way home, "how did you enjoy the opera? Do you not think De Reszke the greatest singer you have ever heard?"

"Perhaps," he answered, echoing Isabel.

"And Mrs. Jack Sherwood? I notice you did not stay very long with her; was she not gracious?"

"Very. She asked me to dine with them to-morrow and I accepted."

"She is a very charming woman," answered Arthur enthusiastically. "I am sorry her husband is

not more to my taste, for I should like to see more of her; but of course with Jeannie feeling as she does about him—”

“I wish, Arthur,” Walter began quickly, then checked himself, for he had something to say and knew not how to begin. This was the first time Arthur had mentioned Jeannie’s name to him since the other evening, and he had longed yet dreaded to hear him broach the subject. Jeannie had certainly played her part well, as he began to realise. She had made him her confidant, and that confidence he was bound to hold sacred; she had tied his hands and prevented his putting Arthur upon his guard. Yet one word of warning must be uttered, and he hesitated in what words it should be framed. Arthur’s next sentence suggested it.

“Don’t let Mrs. Sherwood make a fool of you, Walter.”

“You need not be afraid,” his cousin answered, with unnecessary vehemence, “that she never will do, or any other woman! I tell you, Arthur, I have seen too much of that kind of thing. You think me heartless, and perhaps I am; but it is the result of the experience I have had. Do you know that of the men who began life with me, at least two-thirds have gone to the wall, and why? In almost every case, you can trace it to a woman. In Africa I have seen it time and again, the same old story; a passing infatuation; a gradual deterioration; and at last a ruined life. There was poor old Montjoy of the 12th, the best fellow in the world; but he took a fancy to his Colonel’s wife and was destroyed by it, body

and soul. There was Brown, one of the finest engineers who ever went out there, and in his case the woman was a pitch lower in the scale, but the result was the same. Then there was Fitch, who made that big stroke in the mines, who took to drink and gambled away everything he possessed, all on account of a silly little flippertygibbet of a girl, with the heart of a cat and the brain of a sparrow. No—I swore then it would be a warning to me, and I have kept my word. I may have had passing fancies—I am no saint; but that is different. No woman is going to come between me and my career and work havoc with it, that I swear. When I marry, as I shall some day,—when I can afford it,—it will be some nice girl, with a good temper and fine health, who will help me instead of marring me. And so, my dear Arthur, I hope you will do.”

Arthur, who had listened quietly and with a half smile to this tirade, now said dryly,

“For whom is this eloquence intended, you or me; because if the latter—”

“You are determined to disregard it?” Walter finished dryly.

“No, I do not see its application.”

“Probably not.”

“Come, Walter, be reasonable, or I shall lose my temper,” Arthur said with some exasperation. “What is there in my love for Jeannie which can in any way interfere with my career or ruin my character? She is poor, and so am I; that is all; but we are young and can wait, and we have both simple tastes,”

“My dear fellow, that may be true,” his cousin answered doubtfully; “but is she willing to wait, and will she give you the affection which should repay the devotion of your life;”—a pause—“for that is what you are offering her, Arthur. Or will it be in your case, as in so many others, that she will take all and give nothing?”

Arthur did not answer for a moment, and he had become strangely downcast. At last looking up with something of his old whimsical smile, he said: “I cannot reply to that question now, because I cannot put it to the test by asking Jeannie to marry me; but if it concerns the devotion of a lifetime, why, then, it is a different matter. Jeannie has my heart, as she knows very well, and can do with it what she wishes, just as she has always done, God bless her!” and in the presence of this devotion Walter could find nothing further to urge or to question.

CHAPTER XII

"God made him, and therefore let him pass for a man."

"Merchant of Venice."

BOTH Isabel and her husband were strangely silent on their way home that night. What his thoughts were can only be surmised; but hers partook of the deep dejection which had seized upon her during the opera; all the depressing circumstances of her life seeming to crystallise themselves at that moment into one overwhelming, hopeless load of care and grief.

As she left the carriage and entered the house, Jack followed her into the drawing-room and watched her as she slowly drew off her gloves and sat down beside the dying embers of the fire.

"Tired, Isabel?"

"Yes, very," she answered, her manner expressing nothing but intense physical fatigue.

"So am I, beastly tired; too much so to go to bed. I think I will run over to the club for a bit and see who's there."

Her manner had changed now and became alert again as she said hurriedly and pleadingly:

"Jack, don't go."

"What, why not?" he answered with a surprise that showed how unusual was the request.

"You are in a bad mood to-night, I have seen it all along. If you go there you will be led to drown

it, as you have so often done before. Jack, please don't go."

His face changed and softened for a moment, becoming almost shamefaced and boyish in its expression, as he answered:

"What is the use, Isabel; I am a poor sort. What does it matter?"

"Indeed Jack," she said gently, "it matters very much to your father, to me and to—Bennie."

"Bennie, always Bennie! You think of nothing but that child!"

"I think of you, too," Isabel answered.

"Not much," he exclaimed resentfully, all his former gloom descending on him. "If you had you would never have gone away and left me!"

"Left you!" she cried in undisguised amazement. "And when have I left you, I should like to know?"

"Oh! it amounts to pretty much the same thing in the end," her husband answered fretfully, "when I asked you to go to Europe with me and you would not come."

She stared at him too surprised and indignant to take in his meaning.

"No," he continued as though endeavouring to work himself into a rage in order to keep up his courage, "you knew I was tired and bored and down on my luck, and you let me go off alone, just to stay with your aunt! And I needed you a great deal more than she ever did, and you knew it!"

"Jack," she gasped, a dull horror succeeding the anger which she felt, "do you dare to blame me for that?"

"Oh! I know it was my fault, too," her husband answered, "but I should have kept straight if you had been with me! I swear to you, Isabel, that I should!"

"Don't be too sure," she said with a kind of contempt; "if when my aunt was ill, perhaps dying—"

"But I tell you I needed you much more than she did; and I'm your husband, and you promised to stand by me—"

"Well, have I not?" she asked with magnificent disdain.

"Not then," he said wearily, "you left me all to myself!" His handsome boyish features twitched suddenly and he let himself drop onto a chair, with a kind of abandonment of grief. "Isabel, promise me that you won't do it again; promise that you will stand by me no matter what happens!"

"For Heaven's sake, Jack," she cried, fairly shaking him in her eagerness, "tell me what you are afraid of?"

"I—I don't know," he said dully, passing his hand over his eyes as though to shut something out, "it's just a dread!" Her face softened and she let her hand rest for a moment on his shoulder almost like a caress. "I don't drink for any pleasure I get out of it," he went on wearily, "but just to keep up my courage; just to get rid of this awful dread—that is why I do it."

"But why," she asked again, "has any one threatened you?"

He shook his head, as if literally afraid to put into words, even to her, what his fears were, and his

wife, knowing his secretive nature, did not question any further.

She noticed, with gathering dismay, the yellow pallor of his features, outlined upon the green brocade chair against which he leaned; the utter weariness of his attitude; the despairing droop of his arms; and the never-failing grace which accompanied all his movements; so that what in another man would have seemed a weakness, in him appeared only a hopeless fatality. Could she arrest it? that was the one thought in her mind. Was there any power by which she could hold that wandering fancy; quicken that dulled spirit; and vitalise that weakened frame? As she stood there, looking down on him, her hand still grasping his shoulder, her eyes examining the face before her as though in search of an inspiration, suddenly she was struck by a faint something that reminded her of Elizabeth! a twist of the lip; a turn of the head, and the words leaped to her lips:

"A man in your position ought to set a good example!"

His dull eyes brightened; his head lifted; his form straightened; and for a moment the resemblance to Elizabeth increased before her eyes.

"I know," Jack answered, "what I do matters more on that account!" He got up and stood on the hearth, with his back to the fire, as if striving to restore a measure of importance to his manner. "Of course any one in our class is always envied and criticised and the least thing they do is laid hold of!"

"Then don't give them a handle against you!"

she pleaded, striving to get hold of one argument which she felt might make an impression.

"I have tried," he murmured bitterly, "you don't know how hard I have tried, Isabel!"

She looked at him sadly without answering.

"I do mean to be a decent sort," said poor Jack. "I don't go in for low company, like some fellows; and I don't get mixed up in nasty scandals, now do I, Isabel?"

But as she still did not reply, he continued in the same exculpatory tone: "You have no idea what I run up against; nobodys knows! Men making up to me, on account of the Governor; and women fairly throwing themselves at my head!"

She turned away with a hopeless gesture, and sat down opposite him while a cold icy hand seemed to clutch at her heart. What was there to say, what could she say that would move him, what hold had she except the power of her own vitality; the living force of her strength, as opposed to his weakness, that compelled him against his will to do hers instead! And as she felt this she determined on one more appeal. She got up and went to him, where he stood frowning down upon her, his harassed young face still wearing the half-penitent, half-defiant expression which she had seen in his son, when trying to justify himself against a well-deserved rebuke.

"Jack, dear Jack," she said, laying her hands on his shoulder, "try and keep straight for me; do not put me to shame! Remember how much depends on you; that you are your father's pride! the only son he has; that everything will be yours some day, and

you must carry on his work! Brace up and be a man; struggle against this weakness and this habit, which is dragging you down! Make me proud of you! Do not go there to-night!"

His face changed and softened wonderfully, becoming more than ever like Bennie's at a time when he had acknowledged his fault and found forgiveness and consolation in her love. A feeling of triumph came over her; a sense of almost spiritual elation. She had the means to move him; she had made the right appeal! She would hold him yet against himself, against the world! And even as those thoughts thronged her mind, and she tightened her hold on him with a force that seemed to her to insure possession, not only of his body but his soul, she saw a change come over his face; and a look sprang into it that appalled her. He caught her hands in a vise, and lifting them he passed them about his neck, while he pressed his cheek against hers, murmuring:

"And if I do not, Isabel? If I give it all up, if I stay home with you to-night, how will you reward me? Shall I have your love again? Will it be as it used to be?"

But she had wrenched herself free, and stood before him pale and sad, but with a fierce light in her eyes.

"Jack, remember our agreement!"

"I remember that you are like all women, who only pretend to hate the sin when you really hate the sinner. The blame be on you, then, for the result," and he left her, while she sank into her chair white and broken and shivering as with an ague.

CHAPTER XIII

"O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven.
It hath the primal eldest curse upon it,
'A brother's murder."

"Hamlet."

JACK'S request to his sister in regard to Margaret's intimacy with Arthur Hinsdale might perhaps have passed out of her mind but for a telephone message she received the next morning as she was superintending the children's breakfast.

"Hello, Catherine," Margaret said. "There is to be a festival at the Settlement this afternoon. Will you not let the children come? It is time they learned to do something for others, and it will benefit them as well."

"Thank you, Margaret, but it will not benefit the children to get a contagious disease while they are learning. I cannot think of letting them come."

"You are very foolish over those children, Catherine."

"And you are very foolish over that Settlement," answered her sister, putting up the receiver.

"Oh! Mamma, what is it Aunt Margaret wants us to do?" begged the two little children with eager eyes.

"Get scarlet fever and diphtheria and whooping cough at a festival this afternoon."

"And you will not let us? Oh, Mamma!" came from Eddie with a wail of despair, while May burst into tears, murmuring:

"Bennie is going, and why should he always have all the fun?"

"Now this is too much!" exclaimed their mother, with pardonable exasperation. "If you quote Bennie to me again you will not be allowed to play with him. His mother and I have different ideas!"

May at this wept afresh, and Eddie mumbled between his teeth, "Then I wish Aunt Isabel was my mother!" which though she could not overhear Catherine felt must be detrimental to her.

She left the children to their tearful breakfast, and putting on her things betook herself to her sister's in no amiable mood. She came at an inopportune moment; for Margaret was just getting ready to proceed to the Settlement to make her final arrangements for the afternoon. She had really provided a very beautiful entertainment for the children and their parents, and deserved great credit for the executive ability she had shown, both in her arrangements and the manner they were carried out. The idea had originally come from Arthur Hinsdale, but to her was due its satisfactory execution. Unfortunately one cannot work in this way without danger of feeling a little overstrained, and Margaret felt a good deal so that morning. She listened in undisguised impatience to her sister's complaint.

"Jack never did have much sense," she said vehemently, "but this is really too much, and I should have thought, Catherine, that even you would not

lend yourself to it. The idea of expecting me to break off my friendship with Arthur Hinsdale because he writes poetry."

"Oh! not that alone, Margaret. I have never read his poetry; but Jack says—"

"I do not care what Jack says. Jack's a goose!"

"Jack says he is a Socialistic reformer."

"Undoubtedly, and so am I, an ardent one, and if I had my way a number of our reforms would be made by force. It is perfectly outrageous some of the things—"

"Jack says he wants to reform *us*, and that my father would never approve."

"Jack does not know what he is talking about. Now what could Arthur Hinsdale possibly find to reform in us? No, it is the people he is reforming."

"Jack thinks that is only the beginning, and that later he will attack us."

"Well, Jack talks nonsense, that is all, and even if he did not I have no time to listen to it, for my mind is too taken up with my work, among the poor and suffering. Janet, be careful and don't ram that pin into my neck. What is the matter with you that you are so awkward?"

The pale little maid coloured and apologised, and as she did so the expression of her face struck Catherine.

"Are you not feeling well this morning?" she asked kindly.

"Not very, Mrs. Grey," answered the girl.

"Nonsense. There is nothing the matter with her except too much gadding about at night," answered

her mistress sharply, making up by a little impatience for the gift of some theatre tickets just before. "Here, Janet, take all these packages and carry them down to the carriage, and mind you do so carefully," and as Janet left the room walking a little unsteadily and staggering under her burden, she continued to her sister, "What do you mean, Catherine, by making excuses for that girl? Do you want to spoil her?"

"She looked deathly pale," answered Catherine, who knew something of illness.

"Well, coddle your children as much as you like, but leave my servants alone, please," replied her sister, more than usually ruffled.

Had it not been for this interference she would probably have answered differently, on her return to luncheon, when repeated calls for Janet at last resulted in her arrival, looking paler than ever, and with a curious drawn look about her mouth.

"Janet, you know I particularly dislike to be kept waiting," she said, irritably, "and where is that blouse I asked you to mend this morning?"

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Corning," the girl replied, "I did not know you wanted to wear it to-day, and I waited—"

"You knew, I suppose, that I wanted it some day," Margaret said, with compressed lips. "I have told you again and again, Janet, not to put off doing things! Where are my lists? I asked you to remind me to copy them."

"I did, Mrs. Corning, and so they must be on your desk," Janet said, gently, but her face twitched and she held her breath for a moment as though in pain.

"And what time have I had to copy anything?" Margaret answered, with an angry flush—"No, there is no time to look; the lists are gone; I shall have to use Mr. Hinsdale's. Why are you standing there, Janet, when I am in such a hurry? Come and button my blouse, and don't pull such a long face. What is the matter?"—as the girl still did not move.

"It's nothing, ma'am! I'm all right now," she replied, recovering herself, and Margaret finished her toilet and went down stairs. She ate a hurried luncheon and was just ringing again for Janet when another maid came to her:

"Janet does not feel very well, Mrs. Corning—can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing," replied Margaret, still more put out, for she depended very much on her maid. "It is very annoying, her being laid up now, just when I needed her. Will she be able to go with me this afternoon?"

"I hardly think so, ma'am, she is in such pain."

"Well, you know I have always told you that you all eat too much," Margaret said, impatiently. "Order the carriage; I must go without her, then"—but the other still lingered.

"I think, Mrs. Corning, if you had time to see Janet. She seems to be suffering so that I hardly know what to do for her, and perhaps a doctor—"

"Nonsense. I am surprised at Janet; she usually shows more pluck, and it is very inconsiderate of her to worry me when I am in such a hurry. When I come back if necessary a doctor can be sent for—" but it was very late when she did come back.

The entertainment had been a success; the children

had sung their carol of welcome in a really edifying manner; their exhibit of work had been most gratifying; the dinner had been excellent and was partaken of by more than a hundred people. Mrs. Grey herself had made an instructive little address to the mothers and been loudly applauded; a newspaper man had taken a photograph of the scene and had promised an enthusiastic article; one of the friends present had donated one hundred dollars to the fund; and last, but not least, Arthur Hinsdale's boys had acted a little piece in honour of her in a highly satisfactory manner.

It was something of a blow, after all this, on arriving at her own door to find an ambulance just leaving it, and to be informed on entering by a crowd of frightened servants that it was bearing Janet to the hospital for an operation.

"She was took so bad, ma'am, that we durst not wait till you come home to send for the doctor," said the butler, worried out of his usual calm, "and he said as how there was no time to lose, for it was appendix now and it might be parendix later."

"Appendicitis and peritonitis, I suppose you mean," answered Margaret, with white lips and a quiet she did not feel. "When were they to operate?"

"The instant she got to the hospital; Doctor sent a hurry call," he answered with restored self-importance.

Margaret went slowly to her room, her face looking very pale and drawn; the maid who waited on her before was there, and in tears.

"Oh! ma'am, is there anything I can do for you? Oh! ma'am, ain't it dreadful? Poor Janet!"

"If I had only understood," murmured her mistress.

"That is just what she said, ma'am; that you didn't understand. 'Don't tell Mrs. Corning,' she said, 'she hasn't time to think about me to-day; she is too busy.'"

"Busy!" murmured Margaret again.

She sat down and let the maid take her hat—thinking with a shuddering pang of poor Janet and her deft service—she was watching the clock, and it seemed to her that the time would never pass.

There were her things laid out before the fire—in spite of her illness Janet had remembered them—her wrapper and the slippers she was accustomed to wear; upon the desk lay the book in which she recorded notes of her work, and beside it the lost list, with some pencils sharpened ready for her use; even the blouse she had asked her to mend—Janet had finished it between her intervals of pain. Her every comfort had been studied; her every want anticipated even in this hour, by one who now lay in extremity, perhaps dying!—and by whose fault? Margaret covered her face with a smothered cry, while her mind, as in a moving-picture show, recalled her life, of the past two years, with this young girl. Always the same patience; the same unselfish service and mute submission; the same stoical disregard of pain confronted her; *and what return had she made?* Board and lodging, a month's wages, a little careless kindness!— While for the first time in her

life Margaret realised the gentle martyrdom of service; full measure pressed down and running over, and which no money can ever hope to repay.

The maid brought her a cup of tea, but she pushed it aside; she could not swallow. She was waiting, waiting for the operation to take place; for a chance to ring up the hospital and learn—the truth.

At last, when over an hour had gone by, she got up and dragged herself to the telephone.

She rang; it took a long time, an almost interminable one, before she could get the connection. At last the nurse in charge of the ward was on the 'phone.

"Mrs. Corning, is it, about Janet Brown? Yes, the operation has taken place. I am sorry it was not more successful. Had we had her here even an hour sooner we might have saved her; but now it is too late. Peritonitis had already set in; she is sinking fast; it is only a question of time."

And a little later came the message, "She is dead."

Henry Corning, on returning home that evening, found his wife still sitting by the telephone, with the receiver in her hand, and she said as she stared blankly at him:

"Arthur Hinsdale may find something to reform in us after all!"

CHAPTER XIV

"What, do I love her, that I desire to have her speak again, and feast upon her eyes?"

"Measure for Measure."

WHEN Walter arrived at the Sherwoods' for dinner that evening, he found Isabel alone in the drawing-room, and he realised that a sudden change had taken place in the relations between them. His acquaintance with Mrs. Sherwood had always possessed this peculiarity; that it seemed at any time on the point of ripening into intimacy, and this intimacy had suddenly become a fact.

Walter would have explained it by saying that it was due to a realising sense on his part of her need for pity. Isabel did not try to explain it at all; she only felt that suddenly she had found a friend.

She was looking pale and fagged, her experience of last evening having left its trace upon her, as an early blighting frost leaves traces of its passage in the garden, and under it she had shrivelled and faded like the late roses there.

"You look tired, Mrs. Sherwood," Walter said, taking the seat beside her, "and I very much fear that to-night you should rest instead of receiving company."

"I never rest," she answered briskly. "I am like the Wandering Jew in that. I got out of the habit

of it when I was a girl, and I have never taken it up again."

"That is a pity," he said in his stiffly formal way.

"Your remark is more true than civil; but pray, how would you have me begin?"

He eyed her a moment before replying.

"In one word, relax."

She made a half petulant motion. "How can I relax, when I am tired and under a strain? You might as well require me to 'look pleasant' while having my picture taken." This was said with something of her old manner.

"Do you never stay at home?" he asked wonderingly.

"Yes, sometimes when I am in bed, or have company, or have nothing else to do."

"What a shame," he returned, glancing round the charming room. "I should think you would enjoy being here; it is so lovely!"

"Thank you. I am pleased that you approve. I do enjoy my own house very much, only," and she threw herself back wearily, "I get bored."

"And is there nothing that you like to do?" he asked in the same formally grave manner.

"I used to enjoy reading as a girl, but now I cannot settle down to it. I feel restless."

"And so you run the streets?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Not quite as bad as that, but I exercise, ride, play tennis; skate or go sleighing and coasting. Surely you are with me there."

"Yes, certainly, as far as the exercise is concerned;

but you people, over here, seem to me to have missed the essential thing while having what you call 'a good time.' "

"And what is that pray?" she asked with a smile.

"The power of enjoyment," he answered still gravely. "What is the use of doing all these things just for the sake of doing them unless they divert you?"

"How do you know that they do not?"

He looked her over a second time before replying.

"I do not *know*; I only think so from the way you do them; not you alone, but most of the women I meet. They have such a worried, restless way of amusing themselves; it lacks repose."

"That may be true," Isabel answered deprecatingly; "but I hardly know the remedy. In my own case, for instance—well, I lack repose because I do not possess it! You might teach me the best means to use," she added with a glance from under her lowered lids.

For an instant their eyes met and his mask lifted as he replied:

"I do not think I could teach you a better way than the one you once showed me in speaking of your father's power over animals, which you said you had inherited. Go back to nature; she is really the best teacher."

"I wish I could," she answered gravely and sadly, and at this instant her husband entered.

Jack showed little evidence of the way in which he had spent his evening; his always pale cheek had perhaps become a shade paler, his hand a little less

steady, his manner more hurried, his nerves less under control; that is all; he was still too young to have a moral deterioration show as a physical one; for that he had still some years to wait.

A few minutes later Elizabeth was announced, looking unusually well and disposed to be very gracious. Her coming was due in part to Jack's dread of finding himself alone between his wife and Walter Coffin, and partly to her own wish. Elizabeth liked Englishmen; they satisfied her aristocratic longings, filling her with pleasant visions of living and defunct royalties, in whose pageants she seemed to herself to be taking a vicarious part. She was quite radiantly happy when her careful questioning succeeded in drawing from Walter an account of the Queen's Jubilee, at which he had assisted, and her mood communicated itself to a certain extent to the rest of the party. All went well, therefore, until a question of Walter's, anent Bradford's Journal—returned to us at this time—elicited from Isabel an account of the Mayflower Society to which she belonged, and aroused Elizabeth's displeasure.

"I do not see, Isabel, why you should pride yourself on having ancestors on the *Mayflower*," she said. "They none of them belonged to the English nobility."

"I do not pride myself on anything," answered Isabel with a dangerous flash. "If I did, it would be that I had the intelligence to recognise greatness, even if I could not practise it."

"I do not know what you mean. Our family have

been noted for their intelligence since before the time of the *Mayflower*. We go back to—”

“Really, Elizabeth, I think I would stop there,” interposed her brother. “You will be tracing us back to the Indians next.”

“Jack, you do not understand. Our family—”

“Is a remarkable one, I am sure, for you belong to it.”

Elizabeth was so perplexed whether or no to regard this as a compliment that she was left staring blankly at him, and the conversation was turned aside into less dangerous channels.

But Walter was again filled with an overwhelming sense of pity and indignation.

“Odious woman,” he said to himself, “and to think that this is what that sweet young creature must submit to. It is insufferable!”

Now this was unjust of Walter, and Elizabeth was as far from being an “odious woman” as was Isabel from “a sweet young creature”; but a masculine criticism, if less malicious, is certainly not less unbiassed than a feminine one.

In the meanwhile Elizabeth, fortunately unconscious of the bad impression she had produced, was giving an account of Margaret’s entertainment at the Settlement, which she had attended that afternoon.

“Rotten nonsense!” was Jack’s comment, suddenly recalling to Walter his cousin’s connection with the entertainment and the latter’s strong dislike of Jack Sherwood, presumably a mutual one. Now would have been the time, it might be thought,

proudly to proclaim this relationship and to take his share of the obloquy attached to it; but we regret to state that Walter did nothing of the kind.

"What is the use of raising a hornets' nest about my ears," he said to himself. "It is rotten nonsense when all is said, and so I have told Arthur time and again."

Nevertheless, he felt so uncomfortably conscious of his desire to stand well with Mr. and Mrs. Jack Sherwood that he was obliged to convince himself all through the evening that his regard for their good opinion arose from his business connection with their father.

Jack turned the conversation to big game as soon as the ladies left, and they got along so well together that he was in fine spirits by the time they joined them in the drawing-room.

"I am afraid I must go," Elizabeth said, rising at last. "May I give you a lift, Mr. Coffin?"

"Thank you so much," Walter answered, "but I really enjoy the walk, for I have had no exercise to-day."

"I will go along with you, Elizabeth," said her brother unexpectedly. "You can drop me at the club on your way down. Good-bye, Coffin; see you soon to look over those maps you spoke of," and he followed the reluctant Elizabeth, leaving Walter alone with his wife for the second time. Walter had intended to leave, too, but he weakened after a glance at her face.

She had thrown herself into a large arm chair, and sat with her head thrown back, her eyes closed and

her arms extended,—a picture of utter weariness, her plain black velvet dress making a sombre silhouette against the background of rich brocade and bringing into sharp relief her white skin and fair hair. She opened her eyes at this instant, and catching his fixed upon her said, almost in answer to his thoughts:

“People are very tiresome sometimes, are they not?”

“Very,” he agreed eagerly, strangely enough losing all intention of leaving.

“Now there is Elizabeth,” she went on, “who is so good that she is a constant reproach to me, a living example of everything I ought to be and am not, and ought to do and do not.”

“Heaven forbid,” murmured Walter.

“Oh! you say that because you have a saving sense of humour and she has none; but I assure you her good qualities make me green with envy, and yet—there are times when I fear they will drive me to drink! Excuse the expression.”

“It quite expresses my own feeling!”

“I sometimes have a horrible dread. Do you suppose my *Mayflower* ancestors were at all like her; and would they have the same pronounced disapproval of everything that I do?”

“I should think it very likely,” answered Walter, “that they might be disagreeable. I mean—not that they would disapprove of you, because—”

“Well, finish your sentence, pray!”

“Because deep down in your nature I fancy you may have a grain of Puritanism yourself.”

She sat erect in her chair, a vein of excitement

gleaming in her face and even in her dull sad eyes, as she exclaimed:

"Now how in the world did you know that?"

He smiled at the success of his random shot.

"I guessed it, I suppose. It would be natural enough with your parentage!"

"Yes, natural enough, but not a usual criticism to make of me; for it is as a criticism that you are making it."

"Why should you think so?"

"I guessed it, too! I suppose because I am so sure that you do not like the Puritans. They never looked at the world as it is, and you always do."

"That is a great compliment which you are paying me; I wish it were true."

"I am not so much paying you a compliment as stating a fact. Now I rarely see things as they are, and even when I do I pretend not to. I am always in extremes like them, and look at the world through coloured glasses which are either too dark or too bright, as the case may be."

He smiled at her vehemence.

"I was referring to Puritanism in a slightly different way. I think in a question of right and wrong, for instance, you could be depended on to take a thoroughly Puritan view."

"Meaning I have a conscience?"

"Yes."

She laughed. "It is funny, but you are quite right; though few would agree with you, for that is not my reputation. My poor dear father used to say, 'Isabel will never do what she thinks wrong,

which is lucky; for very few things appear so to her.' He was right; my list of 'do not's' is small."

"In that you are quite modern."

"But infallible!"

"In that you are not modern at all!"

She did not answer and he too was silent, watching her as she sat opposite him, with her arms clasped about her knee, looking at him across it with eager, childlike eyes.

"It has always seemed to me," she went on, "that so few of the things people worry about really matter; they are not wrong except as you think them so; for they do not really hurt you or me, or any one else; while again there are others that strike at the root of everything. If you are guilty of them you would be worse than wicked; you would be unnatural. I express it badly; but you see what I mean?" as an answering flash from his eyes answered her.

"Yes, I see," he said gravely.

"Well, I try not to do them, that is all, and that is where my conscience comes in."

"Tell me some of the things you would never do," he said, humouring her mood.

She hesitated a moment, leaning back in her chair and evidently trying to choose her words.

"I would never go back on a friend," she said at length.

"I do not doubt it," he assented.

"Or hurt any one belonging to me."

He stirred uneasily. "No, I suppose not, and what else?"

"Or steal a person's reputation."

"Steal it?" he inquired.

She smiled a little. "Do you remember those lines of Shakespeare's which begin: 'Good name in man or woman, dear my lord, Is the immediate jewel of their souls.'"

"It seems to me that I do," Walter answered. "Is it not something like this: 'who steals my purse steals trash, but he that filches from me my good name robs me of that which not enriches him and makes me poor indeed,' " he quoted with pardonable pride at his own accuracy.

"Well, that expresses one of the things I could never do," she exclaimed with vehemence. "The theft of a reputation is to me the blackest, basest crime, and yet you see it committed daily and hourly, by people who have every confidence in their own Christian virtue. How can they, how dare they take from you what you value most, your greatest jewel, and yet look askance at the man who only takes a lesser one—your money? It seems incredible!"

"You call a person's good name their greatest jewel?" Walter asked in a tense voice.

"Of course. It would be so to me."

Another pause, and still Walter sat looking at her.

"I was wondering," he said at last, "do you mean by a good name what the world thinks of you or what you know yourself to be?"

She shivered a little as she answered with the same unaccountable vehemence:

"Both, where I am concerned; I am afraid my good name would be of small comfort if shared by

me alone. I have a wicked pride which demands the respect of other people."

"What does it matter," he said with sudden passion. "What does the opinion of others matter if you feel that you are right? My pride, Mrs. Sherwood, is higher than yours; it makes my self-respect of more importance to me than the opinion of the whole world. It is the 'immediate jewel of my soul.'"

"Ah! yes," she answered, "but you are not a woman!" and she sank back upon her chair again.

And it was thus that he continued to see her; on his way home that night, after he had at last taken leave; through the long watches of a restless night; and through many a restless day to come. And still the burden of the refrain was to his mind always the same one:

"I will never take her jewel from her. She shall not suffer at any cost."

CHAPTER XV

"O blessed breeding sun, draw from the earth
Rotten humidity."

SHAKESPEARE—"Timon of Athens."

ARTHUR HINSDALE lived not very far from Fifth Avenue on the top floor of a little old house, in a little dark street. It had been bright enough and pleasant enough when he first came there, the change in its appearance being due to the tall buildings which had begun to go up all about it. "Taking possession of the sun," as he expressed it, "and making a monopoly of the light and air." Many of Arthur's friends, with more common sense than sentiment, wondered that he did not either move away or stop grumbling, the truth being that he found it impossible to do either. He loved his home too much to leave it, and he also loved the memory of what it had been. So that the sight of his loss filled him with never-ending dismay.

Just after Walter's dinner at the Sherwoods', it happened that Arthur was giving a humble entertainment of his own—a tea for Jeannie at which Mrs. Coffin presided and to which he had invited a few friends.

Candour compels us to state that from a worldly point of view Arthur's friends were not a success. There was Tom X, whose play had run two weeks

and been withdrawn; and Harriet Y, who played Ibsen to empty houses; and Tom Z, whose novels appealed neither to public or publishers. This trio formed with Arthur a club entitled "the Failures," to which Jeannie was admitted an honorary member—Arthur having, even yet, found it hard to forgive his cousin for declining that honour.

"If you would study more how to please the public than how to abuse it, you would fare better," Walter had said.

"You are nothing but a Philistine after all!" Arthur had answered.

As may be supposed, Mrs. Coffin was not a peculiarly harmonious addition to their circle, but her company representing in this case propriety and good cheer, the latter insured indulgence for the former; she herself, in spite of her disapproval of Arthur, was as ready as in Jeannie's case, to do him a good turn; her delight at playing the part of Providence to him vieing with her satisfaction at thus making the acquaintance of the very friends she had most strongly reprobated.

Arthur's room was like him, as Jeannie had often said "where extremes jostle each other and yet present a harmonious whole." There were books everywhere; about the rooms, in cases, and on the floor; and also piled up on chairs, and even sometimes in the bath-tub; and there were fine old prints, and many good pictures, presented by artist friends; and though the rug was worn it was an oriental one, and the hangings, though ragged, were of old brocade.

"Your room, Arthur," exclaimed Walter, looking about him, "might have belonged to the college youth who wrote home that he could get along without the comforts of life but he must have its luxuries."

"That youth was Trollope, if I remember correctly," answered Arthur, "and that fact augurs well for me. It was thoughtful of you to bring those cakes, Cousin Olivia, I always liked them."

"How you would have gotten along, Arthur, if I had not provided myself with everything I fail to see! Your tea-pot seems to be cracked, and your biscuits are mouldy, and your tea the refuse of the box!"—and she looked at it with disgust.

"You see I do not often drink it," answered Arthur. "Jeannie, you have done enough—sit down and let us admire you!"

She did so, smiling as pleasantly as if the feast spread before them was the result of her own care: for Jeannie was constitutionally inefficient where anything practical was concerned, and was as unreliable in such matters as the greatest genius in the land. Indeed, she had grown to believe that it was because, and not in spite of such limitations that genius has thriven; the unfortunate part of this reasoning being that it assumed what remained to be proved, her genius. She had certainly a pretty little aptitude, due in part to her power to accomplish quickly and effectually a given amount of work; for if an artistic nature implies inability to produce except under favourable conditions, then one who can make the most of these conditions has surely a great advantage over one who cannot. The difference

between this and real genius being about the same as that between a mill pond and the Atlantic Ocean; which are alike in that they are both fed by streams. Jeannie's talent was a pretty little thing and as far as it went pure inspiration—but it was not the Atlantic and probably never would be. Arthur's friends, however, were not disposed to be exacting, being of the sort who appreciated her peculiar claims to admiration. So they were a merry party as they discussed Mrs. Coffin's contributions to the feast.

Into this pleasant gathering, however, Miss G., talented but tactless, had the misfortune to cast a bomb.

"I hardly expected to find you here again, Arthur," she said. "After the last high building was finished I thought you would take your flight."

Arthur's face darkened.

"What is the use of having the word 'home' in our language if we lose all memory of what it stands for?" he said bitterly, "and what is a home without atmosphere, and how can it be acquired without expressing our personality; and one's personality takes years to express!"

"Mine is expressed in a few days," answered Jeannie. "Give me a palette and paint brushes, and you will soon have atmosphere where I am."

"A home to have atmosphere needs more than the expression of one personality," said Tom Z. "I often think a house never gains it until a number of people have lived and died there. If, as some think, the spirits of the departed haunt their former abodes

it would explain the sympathetic association of some places.

Jeannie shivered and looked about her.

"How gruesome!" she exclaimed.

"It might account for the oppressive atmosphere of other places!" said Walter, smoking meditatively.

"It is a beautiful idea, at any rate," unexpectedly interposed Mrs. Coffin. "Perhaps it is that which makes one old home so dear."

Jeannie smiled and patted her on the shoulder.

"I tell you," went on Arthur, "that homes are dying out and you have only yourself to blame that such is the case."

"How *we*?" said Mrs. Coffin, with dignity.

"Not you, Cousin Olivia," Arthur answered sadly, "for you are like me, fighting a losing fight against the march of so-called progress!"

Mrs. Coffin bridled, well pleased.

"Now look at this place; think what it was when I first came here to live. Think of the sun that used to pour in that window; think of the air that used to blow there; think of the light that was always here—and now see!" with a despairing glance about the room. "Those buildings," pointing with a gently accusing finger across the way, "were built on the property of a friend of mine who had owned it for years and got just what he paid for it. The men who bought it had not \$10.00 between them, but they managed to raise enough by loans as the building went up to pull them through, until they sold it for *ten times* the original price, to its present owner. Now look!" again pointing dramatically, "look at

those signs 'to rent' all over it; does it not show that there was no real demand, that it was all for the interest of the speculators, and that their big profit was made by the ruin of other people's property?"—and again he pointed opposite. "Look there at those houses on either side, which friends of mine had fitted up as homes, ruined; bought for a song by the same band of robbers, I call them. And what about the people who still live and walk through this street? What about the cave of the winds that it has become. What about the sun and light which have been stolen from them?"

"Stolen!" said Mrs. Coffin, dubiously, looking about as if in search of the thief.

"Yes, Cousin Olivia," continued Arthur, with a sort of soft explosiveness, "*stolen*, I say; for it belonged to the people; it was free to all, and it has been taken from them! I tell you," he went on, "we are doing just what England has always done—exploiting the land for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many. The only difference is that we do perpendicularly on a small scale what she has done horizontally on a large one. She monopolises the country for the benefit of the rich and we do the same by the city. In the one case the people suffer in their food; in the other in light and air. It amounts to pretty much the same in the end."

"Not exactly," said Walter, taking another muffin, "because food is more important than light."

"Not for the health of the coming race," contradicted Arthur. "I should say the former was much the more important; because it enables people to live

on less, and you have only to look at animals to be convinced of it. Sun and air should be free to all and we are making them the prerogatives of the rich."

"If they want sun let them go to the country for it," said Mrs. Coffin.

"How can they when their living must be earned in town?" demanded Arthur irately, "and when the towns are encroaching on the country to such an extent that very soon there will be no country left to go to. And in the meantime the price of land is rising, and we allow the owners to make additional profits by piling up buildings, which ruin their surroundings and make a monopoly of daylight.—And who is benefitted—the people who make the laws? No, a thousand times—the speculator, pure and simple, who profits by our criminal credulity, and the politicians who can get higher taxes from them as a result of it."

"Do not run down the speculators, Arthur," exclaimed Tom X. "I am sure it is the only way I shall ever make any money."

"I admit the new buildings are hideous," said Dick Y, "and have ruined the city wherever they went; but, really, Arthur, I think your injuries blind you to their importance. They are only confined to a small business section."

"Are they indeed? Well, I tell you that in the course of fifteen or twenty years you will not know this city. They will sweep over it like a flock of locust, ruining every building in sight. Murray Hill will go; Fifth Avenue will become a wind-swept tunnel; and we shall not only lose our homes, but our

walks in the sunlight, as well as our taste for beauty."

"Beauty!" said Jeannie bitterly, "do you expect us to keep our taste for beauty?"

Arthur turned toward her and his mouth wore its lovely child-like smile.

"Beauty," he said gently, "why, we have as much right to it as to life itself; why, to take it from the people is as wicked as to deprive them of liberty;—it brutalises them! If our cities lose it, they will gradually lose every one who cares for it and then woe to them and to those who are left there!"

"Come, Arthur," said his cousin, "you are a poet and can draw a gruesome picture; but it would not do for an Englishman like me to malign your citizens as you do. No enlightened people will permit the destruction of their city to enable a few men to make a fortune. They have not sunk so low as that, even here, begging your pardon."

"You are quite right, Walter," said Mrs. Coffin. "Arthur, I am surprised at you. You ought to know by this time that the American people cannot be fooled all the time but only some of the time, as George Washington used to say, or was it Alexander Hamilton?"

"Never mind, Mother, the sentiment is correct any way, and Arthur I hope will profit by it."

Said Arthur, gloomily, "We shall see."

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And they did in twenty years' time.

CHAPTER XVI

"Trifles light as air
Are to the jealous, confirmation strong,
As proofs of Holy writ."

"Othello."

THE company, all somewhat oppressed by Arthur's pessimism, were still gazing blankly through the fast gathering dusk at the tall dark building opposite, when they were suddenly brought to themselves by a knocking at the door, and before Arthur could answer it was flung open from without and his landlady announced with great ceremony "Mrs. Corning." The others had found their way unattended up the badly lighted stairway; but such is the power of a liveried footman on the female mind. Arthur had not at all prepared his friends for this uncongenial addition to their circle, and they all stared with varying emotions, as Margaret advanced into the room, saying deprecatingly: "I am afraid I am a little late."

Mrs. Coffin rose to the occasion with her usual gentle good breeding.

"Not at all," she said, advancing cordially to meet her, "the tea is still warm and there is yet toast, though they have eaten the muffins. Let me give you some. I am Arthur's cousin, Mrs. Coffin, and this is Miss Caxton, Mrs. Corning," introducing Jeannie, who happened to be nearest her.

Jeannie bowed silently, without rising; but Arthur had in the meantime recovered himself and hurried forward, upsetting a chair in his eagerness.

"I was afraid you were not coming," he said hospitably, turning to introduce his friends; but Walter alone answered his call. The "Failures" were putting on their things preparatory to leaving, partly disgusted, partly embarrassed, by the advent of the new arrival; and Jeannie still kept her seat by the window, looking dully at Margaret's back.

Poor Margaret, she was too oppressed by her own unhappy thoughts to notice or resent the effect produced by her presence. She had come partly because of Arthur's urgent invitation, and partly because her restless self-reproach drove her wherever she felt there was a chance of obtaining relief. Never in the course of her whole easy, prosperous life, had she sustained such a shock, and to her first grief and bewilderment had succeeded bitter, though perfectly aimless, remorse. Janet was dead; killed as a result of her negligence; that fact alone stood out plainly to her mind; but exactly to what this negligence was due, whether to herself or fate, or the interference of her family, she hardly knew; for she had eliminated her husband's explanation that it was the result of fatigue caused by undue exertion for others.

She pulled herself together, however, and drank her tea, meekly accepting Mrs. Coffin's attentions and Walter's civility, and Arthur's sympathy, and even finding occasion to compliment Jeannie on one of her portraits which she had seen. Jeannie said very

little, and Arthur wondered somewhat at her lack of cordiality; which he did not venture, even in his own mind to call lack of good breeding; for though he had had occasion to notice before now that she was not always at her ease with women, yet it seemed to him that her manner to Mrs. Corning had been unnecessarily abrupt. As this tea had been given largely for the purpose of bringing his two friends together he felt a vague disappointment at its result. Margaret lingered after the others had left, saying:

"Mr. Corning is to call for me here. I expect him at any moment." Then as Arthur returned to her side, after the departure of his guests, "Mr. Hinsdale," she said, "I am in despair over this thing."

Margaret's face, always strongly marked, had become in the last few days the home of a hundred wrinkles; her head held so uncompromisingly erect, now drooped wearily, and even her clear strident voice had acquired a worried ring.

"Yes, I heard from Mr. Corning about poor Janet, and I am truly sorry," he answered.

She puckered her forehead despairingly.

"It is not only her death, and my negligence; but I feel as if I was in some terrible way to blame," she cried. "Mr. Hinsdale, the family insist that you are a reformer—tell me what is wrong in me?" She waited, watching his face intently, and then as he did not speak, she went on in her oddly softened tone. "I am almost sure there must be something, or I should never have been so terribly punished."

"My dear Mrs. Corning, you must not let that poor girl's death make you morbid," Arthur said

at last; "we all make mistakes, and sometimes we suffer for them and sometimes other people do—that is all."

Margaret looked at him doubtfully, an almost pathetically puzzled expression about her firm mouth and clear determined eyes.

"I do not know," she answered. "I have always intended to do right. I have never in my life done anything wrong, at least intentionally, and my judgment is so good that I can generally rely on it—that is what puzzles me—" and she wrinkled her forehead again, "but in this case it must have failed me for once; I think it must; I cannot see any other explanation." She paused, looking at him doubtfully as if almost begging him to contradict her; but as he did not, she continued slowly:

"It is barely possible that I may have tried to do too much outside and neglected things in my own home; but I thought I did my duty there so perfectly! That is what I cannot understand!"

Arthur Hinsdale was neither censorious, nor prone to indulge in satire at the expense of his friends, else a certain parable might have occurred to him and interfered with his appreciation of Margaret's very genuine distress. As it was, he answered kindly:

"May it not be that we all try to *do* too much, while after all it is our sympathy which really counts?"

She looked up with sudden comprehension.

"I verily believe you are right! I really think that it is possible that I may at times have been unsympathetic," and Margaret passed her hand over

her eyes, as though trying to take in a new idea.

"Yes, perhaps I may; it is so very hard to put yourself in other people's places and have patience with them when they are foolish—too foolish to take your advice!" Again she reflected with dawning understanding. "I think sometimes that my good sense may have made me a little hard; perhaps in my family occasionally," she confessed, "and sometimes with my sister-in-law. Yes, I suppose I may have been a little severe on Isabel!" and again she looked at him almost pleadingly. As Arthur, however, felt himself unable to contradict her, he contented himself with saying:

"Mrs. Sherwood strikes me like a person who possesses a good deal of sympathy."

Margaret stirred uneasily.

"Yes," she said at last magnanimously. "Yes, I suppose she does, and that may be the reason we do not get on better together. I never had any patience with people who did not agree with me; but Isabel is simply sorry for them. Perhaps," she concluded, with dawning humility, "she may be right and I wrong."

"Perhaps," Arthur agreed, "for they did not have your advantages."

Margaret reflected a moment on this new idea of toleration so foreign to her temperament.

"There may be something in what you say," she answered, finally, "though it had not occurred to me in that way before. I will think it over and try to profit by it," and perhaps even Arthur did not appreciate the moral courage which she showed by this

admission. There was a pause while Margaret sat turning over in her mind this foreign view of human nature.

"Thank you so much for your kindness, Mr. Hinsdale," she said at last as she rose to go; "you have helped me a great deal, and it just shows," she exclaimed, struck with a new thought, "how abominably Jack and the family have misjudged you when they tried to make me break off my friendship on account of your views. Jack said that you thought that we ourselves were in need of reform, and dear knows Jack is very badly (which I hope I shall have grace given me not to tell him); but I shall take the liberty also of telling him how kind you have been to me, and that you are the only one of them all who appreciates what I feel about this."

How much farther Margaret's confidence might have carried her, it is impossible to say, for at that instant Henry Corning arrived and brought with him a sane and scholarly atmosphere which was a relief to every one. It was only after he and his wife had left, after much sympathetic admiration of Arthur's books and prints, that he had time to be very angry.

So Jack Sherwood had tried to break up all intercourse between him and his family—"What an outrage!"

Arthur was divided between indignation at Jack and intense, almost furious, curiosity at his motive in so doing. What reason *could* he have for hating him like this? And for the first time a little faint suspicion began to stir in Arthur's mind, like the

first noiseless stirring of a poisonous snake. Jealousy, "the green-eyed monster," was raising its head and whispering to him that the only cause powerful enough to account for this was—Jeannie; that their only point of disagreement was—Jeannie; and it suddenly whispered to him, for the first time, suspicions of Jeannie herself. Why had she betrayed this unaccountable agitation at the mention of Jack Sherwood's name? Why did she shun any chance of meeting with the Sherwood family? Why did she seem so jealous of Jack's wife? Why had she given such a contradictory account of her acquaintance with Jack himself, for that it was contradictory Arthur was now as sure as he had been before convinced to the contrary.

We all know the result of such reasoning. In a short time Arthur was filled with as furious unreasoning jealousy of Jack Sherwood, and as strong doubt of Jeannie as the very spirit of mischief himself could have desired. To add to the picture his cousin's words of warning suddenly recurred to him, and completed his wrathful indignation.

"Curse him!" he thought with an unaccountable rancour against Walter, which we so often feel for those more clear sighted than ourselves. "What right has he to interfere in my affairs, and come to me with stories against her—" and then suddenly as the memory of one particular story of Walter's recurred to his mind— Was it possible, was it credible, that this story was Jeannie's own? that she and that other Jeannie were one and the same and that Jack Sherwood—horror!

When Arthur reached this point he was filled with such wild rage that he seized his hat and coat and rushed out into the night. Where he went or what he did he could never clearly remember. He had only a vague recollection of walking on and on; faster and faster, more and more furiously, up hill and down; and sometimes going about in a circle, for it seemed to him that he recognised again places that he had seen shortly before; till at last, hours after, he suddenly came to himself; and oppressed and broken down, conscious of overwhelming fatigue, he staggered into a neighbouring saloon and asked for a drink.

The drink steadied him; he looked at his watch; it was six o'clock in the morning, and he had been walking steadily since seven the night before.

"Will you tell me," he said to the man as he paid him, "where I am?"

"In Harlem, boss," with a laugh at his dazed look; and Arthur staggered into the street and took the car for home, where he arrived just before daylight.

"I have been a fool," he said to himself as he undressed, "a jealous fool and deserve to be kicked for my pains. The whole thing is a bad dream, a figment of my imagination; I will write a poem on it as a punishment; and then put it out of my mind entirely and forever—but—I will keep my eyes open after this!" and Arthur went to bed.

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Meanwhile Mrs. Coffin and her son had walked home together after taking leave of Arthur.

"I think," said the former, thoughtfully, lifting up her dress over a puddle, "that really Jeannie will make Arthur an admirable wife after all."

Walter stirred uneasily.

"She is so docile, and Arthur is like most men in that he cannot bear contradiction. Now even when he made that foolish assertion about the high buildings becoming so common as to ruin New York, did you notice that she said nothing?"

"Yes, Jeannie has tact," replied Walter.

"And a splendid quality it is, my son, and one that I consider almost essential in a wife. Your poor dear father was the best man that ever lived; but how I should have gotten along with him had I not possessed it Heaven knows! I just listened to everything he had to say," went on Mrs. Coffin blandly, "no matter how silly I thought his reasoning, or how unjust his prejudice, I agreed to it all, and then went out and did exactly as I pleased. We got along perfectly together; I really never remember that we had a disagreement."

Walter had a spasm of inward laughter.

"Now you, my son, have often a trying way of listening as if you did not agree with one word that was said; but did not care to take the trouble to argue; and there is nothing a woman dislikes so much! I am not speaking of myself, for you and I generally think alike on most subjects; but I have noticed it with other people, and I assure you they do not like it!"

"Very well, Mother, I will try and mend my ways!"

Mrs. Coffin nodded, well pleased, and Walter walked along moodily beside her. Twice he essayed to speak and thrice shut his lips together irresolutely; for with his mother, as with Arthur, Jeannie had tied his hands.

"Confound it!" he said to himself, "I am tired of this life! I am not fitted for it and am better away. There seems to be no freedom here, and no excitement either; nothing at all to divert a man and make him forget his cares—" though what these cares were he did not own even to himself.

It must not be supposed for a moment that Walter had by any means ceased in his search for employment during these weeks spent at his mother's, in what seemed to him unmeaning idleness. On the contrary he had prosecuted this search persistently, and so far vainly. It may have been that he had grown more particular, or that opportunities were fewer, for certainly he found nothing that suited him; and at last he realised himself that he was a little difficult to satisfy, and that whereas he felt very anxious to leave New York he was at the same time equally anxious to stay. And in the meanwhile he had begun to go out there. His mother's friends were only too pleased to invite him and Mrs. Sherwood's had also followed suit. Only that morning he had received a card from Mrs. Farnum, to whom Isabel had introduced him, with "music" written in the corner. It was one of that lady's small informal musicales, at which she attempted the difficult task of uniting in her drawing-room the artistic and fashionable circles of New York.

Walter went rather unwillingly for he was not fond of music and he told himself that he was not anxious of again meeting Isabel. When he arrived, however, he was able to verify the fact that a woman's moods are quite as variable as a man's, and as little to be relied on, for Isabel on her part showed a corresponding indifference to him; and whenever he approached her seemed to have only eyes and ears for her companion of the moment.

She was beautifully gowned in the very extreme of fashion and there was something, both in her look and manner, which partook of the aloofness and haughtiness of the great lady who condescends. Walter had noticed this in her before, but never to the same extent as this evening. He seemed to be the only one to feel it so, however, for Mrs. Sherwood, as was evident to him, was much courted and sought after; and appeared as far above him, to all appearances, as were she indeed the queen, which in his mind that night she seemed to him to be.

Toward the end of the evening, however, after Bach's music had somewhat thinned the rooms, and people were talking of supper, and longing for bed, he found himself again near her and approached, with the commonplace remark:

"How are you this evening, Mrs. Sherwood?"

"Very well indeed; I never felt better. Oh! must you go, Mr. Westcott? It is a great pleasure to have met you. I have enjoyed it as much as I did the music."

"D—— the man," thought Walter. "I suppose

he believes that. "Did you really care for the music?" he continued aloud.

"Very much or I should not have said so; and you?"

"I hate Bach," replied Walter gloomily. "To me he seems to be going on forever, as if he had neither a beginning nor an end."

"You show your bad taste then. To me he is music incarnate; but I should not expect every one to agree with me."

A silence which Mrs. Sherwood broke.

"Do you expect to be here much longer, Mr. Coffin?"

"I really do not know; it depends on how soon I get employment elsewhere."

"Because I am giving a skating party a little later, and I will send you an invitation if you care to come."

"Where is it to be?" he asked.

"Oh! at Erneliff. We go up for the day, dine at the house, and return by a late train. It is rather fun and I hope you can go. Jack expressed a wish to have you."

Again as he accepted, Walter experienced the curious sensation, that what would have seemed in another woman a flattering attention, became from her almost an act of gracious condescension. He marvelled at it as he took his leave, chilled and yet fascinated by her manner.

After this it became Walter's habit to go out wherever and whenever he would be likely to meet Mrs. Sherwood. He found that she went to every

ball, attended every big dinner, visited every restaurant, and heard every play and every opera. Wherever the fun was fast and furious, wherever there was life and excitement and gaiety, there she was sure to be and there Walter followed her. He attended the opera Monday night when she was there, taking a seat where he could observe her box, and watch her as she entered it, fair and radiant, with her bright smile, and in her eyes as she glanced about the house the curious, faint expression of dread. Sometimes he only bought standing room and stood and watched her through one act; often going away without even speaking to her. He did this, though he was not fond of music, and, though he disliked dancing, he attended all the balls to which he was invited, for the sake of an occasional dance with her, or the chance perhaps of taking her down to supper. He never stayed late and he never paid her any marked attention, nor, be it noted, did he receive any encouragement to do so, for her manner was always the same abruptly cordial one of their first acquaintance, with its frank but impersonal aloofness.

However, if Isabel did not encourage him others did, and he was to experience the usual fate of good-looking, well-born young Englishmen in this city, invitations and attentions galore, with abuse if he declined, and criticisms if he accepted them. Walter steered a generally straight path in this matter by going only where he would see Isabel.

"Why should I not?" he said to himself in his rare periods of self-examination. "She is the only

woman I have met who diverts me, and I need diversion. I have had a hard life of it these few years, and I shall have a hard life of it again very soon, I hope. This is my holiday season, and why should I not enjoy it in my own way? I am nothing to that woman and she can never be anything to me; but I like to look at her and I like to meet her sometimes, and her smile is like a breath of fresh air and makes me feel again that life is worth living." And Walter sighed, very sorry for himself.

CHAPTER XVII

God rest ye merry gentlemen; let nothing you dismay
For Jesus Christ our Saviour, was born on Xmas day.

Old Carol.

THE Christmas season was rapidly approaching; that season which stands for jollity and good cheer; mirth and merriment; gaiety and glee; and which means instead to so many, lavish expenditure, tired limbs, a heavy heart, and an empty pocket-book. The Sherwoods really belonged to neither class; but formed one of their own between the two.

The sisters were together one afternoon at Elizabeth's about this time tying up Christmas presents. They did their Christmas shopping and purchased their gifts with the same elaborate thoroughness which characterised them in other things. It was all perfect, well ordered, and well done, and what it lacked in spontaneity was more than made up by perfection of detail. Each member of the family made a list of their wishes, and these lists were passed about for every other member to strike off what they proposed to give, there being a good deal of mystery observed after the list had once left the hand of its author; who, though she knew what she was to receive, was not supposed to know from whom she was to receive it. Isabel had, on first coming into the family, covered herself with opprobrium by ob-

jecting to these simple and obvious methods, and insisting on a more sentimental mode of procedure; but Isabel had as usual given in, and now made out her list like the others, with the care and attention she used before a shopping expedition. Of course with the outside world it was impossible to employ the same method; but the sisters had devised one nearly as efficacious by making their own gifts correspond as exactly in expenditure, and as much as possible in kind, to those of their friends; so that the ones giving books got books in return; the ones giving plants got plants; and so on through a long and interesting category.

This afternoon they were very busy indeed, packing everything into certain Christmas boxes, made expressly for them, and tying all up with white paper, red ribbon, and bunches of holly, so that the room looked like a Christmas bazaar.

"Do be careful, Margaret," said her sister, "you are putting the wrong direction on that parcel. It should go to Mrs. Brown and you are sending it to Mrs. Grey."

"Why, what difference can it make?" asked Margaret; "they both get pictures, and what do you care which goes to which?"

"I care very much," answered Elizabeth; "the picture for Mrs. Brown cost \$3.00 more than the one for Mrs. Grey and you have reversed them."

"What if I have?"

"Mrs. Brown's present to us last year was at least that much more valuable than Mrs. Grey's."

"Are you sure?" asked Margaret, pausing with

her pen in her hand; "because I have enclosed the other Christmas card—" and she read aloud from the one before her, "For dear Mrs. Grey with the love and good wishes of her three adopted daughters"—for the sisters gave many of their gifts together as being at once economical and convenient.

"Reverse the cards."

"I cannot, the other is inside the package."

"Oh, well, Margaret, if you will not do things right, what is the use of doing them at all," snapped Elizabeth, who was tired and a trifle fractious.

Margaret showed unexpected docility, only murmuring as she undid the package,

"Poor Janet used to do so much for me!"

"Really, Margaret, you are inclined to be morbid about that girl. I think it is positively wrong to worry so over a servant. It is like putting them in the position of one of the family."

"Speaking of the family," here interposed Catherine, "have any of you seen Jack lately? He used to stop in quite often to see me, and now he never does." A pause which was broken by Elizabeth:

"I consider," she said, "that Jack is behaving very badly, and I do not blame my father for being vexed with him. If he must make himself notorious with a married woman he might at least have chosen some one we knew."

"Why, who is he attentive to now?" asked Catherine with eager interest.

"Oh! an odious creature from Chicago or Milwaukee, or somewhere. What does her name matter; nobody ever heard of her."

"Would it be any better if they had?" demanded Margaret.

"Well, at least it would be more respectable!"

"I blame Isabel very much," said Catherine plaintively. "I think if she made home pleasanter for him that he would stay there more, whereas she is always somewhere doing something, so of course—"

"If she did stay at home we should blame her for not going out," remarked Margaret with praise-worthy impartiality. "I do not see that it is Isabel's fault because her husband is attentive to another woman."

"It is her fault if other men are attentive to her," said Catherine severely. "A mother should give her mind to her children. I am sure since mine were born I have never looked at any man."

"It seems to be more a question of men looking at her," Margaret said meditatively, "and Isabel is fond of Bennie."

"Is she? She did not even give him a bath herself when he was a baby; and now she does not put him to bed. A pretty mother who does not do that."

"What is the matter with you this afternoon, Margaret?" asked Elizabeth. "You are more perverse than usual. As soon as anybody says anything you immediately contradict them."

"I am doing nothing of the kind," answered Margaret, "and if I do it is because you are unjust to Isabel."

"You did not used to be so fond of Isabel!"

"I am not fond of her at all, but I am trying to have sympathy for her."

"And I suppose you have sympathy with that Mr. Coffin who cannot see or hear any one else when she is near!" said Elizabeth austerely, for the eyes of a jealous woman are sharp, and Elizabeth had noticed what had escaped the rest of the family.

"I do not believe he admires her in the least," contradicted Margaret, "or if he does it is a perfectly proper admiration. I know the young man well, and I am sure a cousin of Arthur Hinsdale's would never make himself obnoxious in this way."

The sharp retort that this remark would surely have elicited from Elizabeth was checked by her suddenly catching a glimpse of the disorder in the room.

"Girls, girls!" she exclaimed, "you really must be more careful and put your things away. I cannot leave this room as it is, and it is the second house maid's afternoon out."

"Then let the first house maid take her place," said the more radical Margaret.

"Impossible, it would upset everything! No, we must put the room in order ourselves, and then it can be cleaned to-morrow morning." And the effort attendant upon carrying this out effectually prevented any further discussion of the dangerous topic.

In the meanwhile Isabel, the subject of it, was seated by the window in her little sitting-room, with Bennie and his two little cousins beside her, all occupied in tying up presents for the tree which Mrs. Sherwood gave yearly to the children at Erncliffe.

"How jolly Christmas is!" Bennie was saying; "it is such fun to be sure of getting everything you want, and yet not knowing exactly what it is to be."

"We know," said his little cousin importantly, "mamma says we are old enough now to begin to 'acquire things' at Christmas; so that when we are big we shall have something to show for it."

"How hateful of her!" pouted Bennie.

"Bennie, do not criticise," interposed his mother.

"What is criticise, Aunt Isabel?"

"Saying things about people you would not wish them to say about you."

"Is that in the Bible?"

"Yes, not in just those words."

"How funny because it is what grown-up people are always doing."

"I know; but I do not mean that Bennie shall."

May crept nearer to her and patted her cheek.

"Then I think I won't criticise either, for I want to be like you, Aunt Isabel; you are pretty and you never say 'don't.'"

"I try not to."

"Christmas," said Bennie sententiously, "is 'Peace; good will to men.' Perhaps that is what mamma means."

Isabel stroked his curly head and suddenly dropping her hands she leaned back wearily in her chair, staring out over the housetops to the sunlit sky beyond.

"Mamma is tired," whispered Bennie; "let us play a little by ourselves and let her rest," and they crept away to the other side of the room; but Isabel hardly saw them. She was thinking now of those Christmas times years ago, in her own home, when her father had used those very words to her. She

could see again his worn, thoughtful old face and his white hair, and hear the ring in his voice as he repeated to her: “‘Peace on earth, good will to men’—that means kind words, as well as good gifts, little daughter.” And she had tried hard to follow his teaching. It was but little teaching that he had given her to be sure, she said to herself with a smile, as her mind went back to those days and she saw herself as she was then, a wild free young thing, romping in the air all the livelong day, and at night creeping in dead tired to sleep the dreamless sleep of a happy child, with her dog clasped close in her arms. She saw herself as she followed her father about in his wanderings among the animals she understood less, but loved as much, as he; and she saw herself in many a wild ride over the hills with her wild young brother— Where was he now, poor boy? it seemed years since she had last heard from him, after he first got the gold fever and went West;—but then he was but her gay, thoughtless companion and many a deed of daring had they done together in those bright days, now gone forever.

And then she thought of her girlhood, and the sudden appearance on the scene of her clever worldly aunt, and the finishing school to which she had been sent, to prepare for her coming out, under that same aunt’s charge. How she had enjoyed it all; what a world of light and beauty it had seemed to her!—a world formed to admire and do her bidding, for was she not the success of the season, about to make the great match of the year? She remembered how little urging she had needed to follow in this, her

aunt's, wish, because in her own light-hearted way she had loved Jack well; a little less than her father who had died soon after; a little more than her horse who was living yet; but still she had cared for him and he was good to her, and the world seemed a very lovely place indeed until—and then her mind went back to those early days of her married life; those days of disillusionment, and at last of shock and irreparable loss. She remembered her father's sudden death, just at a time when his counsels would have meant the most to her, and her slowly gathering dismay at her husband's indifference to her grief. And as she struggled for his sake to throw it aside, her shock on receiving the news of her aunt's fatal illness. She remembered how she had insisted upon staying with her, in spite of Jack's remonstrance, and her dazed surprise when he had left her there to go abroad; and how this feeling had lingered even while she watched the going out of a worldly lonely life. That he should leave her then to bear it all alone, that seemed to her the awful part; as she made her necessary sad acquaintance with illness and decay. And she felt again the terror and dread of it close about her, engulfing her, as with a dark cloud of horror, from which shone forth one beam of light—Bennie.

“My jewel!” she murmured, and then she seemed to hear that other voice repeat after her: “The jewel of my soul!” And she saw him again as she had seen him that night, strong, vigorous, commanding, master of himself and his own fate; she felt again the magic of his look, the caressing

inflexion of his voice, the alluring charm which for a few moments he had cast about her, and then—but it was only for a moment, the next she had opened her eyes and was looking at Bennie. “My jewel,” she murmured softly again and at the same instant sounded a knock at the door.

“May I come in?” said Mr. Sherwood, entering in answer to his grandson’s invitation. “How are you, Isabel, and you, children?” to the three little ones who crowded about him.

“We are getting ready for Christmas,” said Bennie, as acknowledged favourite, seizing his hand.

“So I see, you are certainly taking time by the forelock. Well, go into the other room and get your supper, which I also see is ready there. I want to talk to your mother.”

“You always see everything,” said Isabel, smiling, as she cleared a place for him to sit down.

“Ye-s, I sometimes wish I did not,” he replied, seating himself.

She gazed at him blankly and again he saw gathering in her eyes the same expression which he had noticed once before.

“Is it about Jack?” she asked.

“Yes, about Jack,” he answered in the same tone.

She looked down at her hands, nervously clasping and unclasping them.

“Jack seems to be making himself talked about more than usual,” went on her father-in-law.

“And you have come to ask me to stop it?” she inquired.

"I have come to ask you to try." A pause.

"Mr. Sherwood," Isabel said at last, "I will do what I can, I always have; but I feel that it is useless. You know what Jack is and has always been; and that he must have excitement. He always has had it, of one kind or another, from the first. A little while ago, you remember, we were both frightened because he was drinking so hard as to undermine his health, and you begged me to help you, and I suggested another excitement to take its place. It worked for a time, and then it failed, as it always will. *Then* he liked several women who belonged to his own set; now it is one woman and she does not!—but what can we do, for it will always be the same. We can break that off, yes, or leave it to wear off—Jack's fancies never last long—but then something else will take its place; and it may be something that we shall like even less."

He was aghast, for he had never heard her talk so openly before, and he stared at her blankly, silently, as she went on in soft even tones, pronouncing what seemed to him the doom of the son whom he loved—and at last,

"You are his wife," he said almost coldly; "do you condemn him without even an appeal to his better nature?"

"Mr. Sherwood, every such appeal that could be made I have made! I have begged him in my name and in Bennie's, I have tried everything in my power, my whole life has been an effort; but it is useless. My hands are tied; I can see nothing more to be done."

He got up and paced the floor.

"There is yet one thing we have left untried," he said; "absence. He has been talking to me about a trip to Africa to shoot big game. I opposed it; but I shall do so no longer; let him go."

"It might work for a time," she agreed dully; "we can but try. I will do all I can,"—and at that instant a servant at the door announced,

"Mr. Coffin in the drawing-room, Madam; shall I say at home?"

"Very well, I will come presently," answered Isabel.

"No, go down at once and I will accompany you," said her father-in-law. Then stopping her as she reached the door, he continued coldly,

"There is one thing that sometimes has a great effect upon a man—jealousy—try it, Isabel." And before she had time to answer he had left the room and she followed, her mind a confused whirl of thoughts and feelings as she pondered upon his meaning.

Walter was in the drawing-room as they entered it; more commanding but graver than ever and with a look of sharp excitement in his eyes.

"I came to wish you good-bye, Mrs. Sherwood," he said.

"You are leaving?" she asked, her heart beating a little rapidly.

"Yes, I have at last received the offer of a position which is too good to refuse," he answered. "It will call me south for a couple of weeks, and I very much fear that I may miss your skating party."

"Do you expect to return before Christmas?" Mr. Sherwood unexpectedly interposed.

"If I am fortunate, yes."

"Then come and spend it with us at Erncliffe. We were talking about it before you came. My son is very much taken with the accounts of your African trip. I think his health requires a holiday and I should be glad of all the information which you are able to give him on the subject."

"Thank you," Walter answered, "I shall be glad to come and I will do all I can to assist him."

His voice shook slightly as he uttered the words; he felt giddy and his brain seemed to reel. Was everything suddenly coming his way? He could hardly believe what he heard.

"I must go," Mr. Sherwood said. "Good-bye, Isabel! Good-bye, Mr. Coffin!" and he was gone.

Isabel turned and motioned him to a chair.

"Will you not sit down and I will order tea."

He stopped her as she put her hand upon the bell. "No, please, I have only a few minutes to stay. I must pack, as I go to-night, so let me spend the time quietly here with you. I so rarely see you except in crowds."

"I am so rarely anywhere else," she said, looking up with her furtive smile.

"Then are you not happy at the thought of being at Erncliffe again?"

She smiled the same smile. "Perhaps."

"I am," he went on in the tone which was not like his own at all; but had something in it at once dazed

and triumphant, while his eyes devoured her. "I can hardly believe in my good luck."

"Tell me," she asked,—“this appointment—did you get it through my father-in-law?”

His face darkened. "Not that I know of—why?"

"No reason, I only asked. I am glad it is satisfactory to you. Is it for long?"

"That I cannot say yet," he answered, with a pleased smile; "it depends on what satisfaction I give. It is a Southern railroad, which has gone into a receiver's hands. The reconstruction committee want an engineer to report on its condition and have appointed me. It is good pay and easy work—a god-send to me, for I was beginning to be worried."

"It must be fine," she said, as she had said at their first meeting, "to have a profession in which you create instead of destroying, and which absorbs you above everything else. It must make you happy."

"It used to!" he exclaimed, almost without his own volition, his eyes again seeking hers; and then suddenly rising,

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye," she said, giving him her hand.

CHAPTER XVIII

"Kiss me, though you make believe,
Kiss me though I almost know
You are kissing to deceive.
Let the tide one moment flow
Backward, ere it rise and break,
Only for poor pity's sake."

ALICE CARY—"Make Believe."

THE short winter twilight was drawing to a close, lights had begun to twinkle along the streets and in the buildings, shining through the mist which covered everything with a thin coating of frosty white. There was a thrill of Christmas in the air; it lingered among the eager jostling throng; gleamed from shops aglow with Christmas offerings; turned florists' windows into winter gardens; and filled the hearts of all who felt it with a youthful thrill of joy. Walter Coffin, walking among them, with a quick step and head held high, could have sung and laughed for joy. It coursed through his veins and throbbed in his temples and thrilled through every muscle of his well-knit frame. The joy of youth and health, and gratified ambition; selfish pagan, full of its own hopes; filling the universe with its own radiant, bounding, sensuous delight. The joy that is like young love, objectless and yet engrossing, and that passes so soon that only a faint memory of it lingers, to remind us that our youth is not yet past.

Walter could have given no reason for this feeling, but it was with him still when he reached his mother's house, and entering hastily found Jeannie with her. The latter had come to make arrangements with Mrs. Coffin about some sittings for a portrait, intended as a Christmas present for her son, and his entrance checked their eager discussion.

"It is settled, Mother, and I am going," he said, kissing her, with some of the radiance of his experience still on his face. Jeannie started a trifle, but Mrs. Coffin continued her gentle aimless task, a garland of roses on the still unfinished table cover.

"I am glad, my son, if you are, and especially since there is a chance of your return for Christmas."

"I am terribly sorry, Mother, but I fear that will be impossible. Mr. Sherwood has asked me to spend it with them at Erneliff and I accepted. I could hardly refuse, considering what his endorsement means to me."

Jeannie started again and glanced searchingly at him, but Mrs. Coffin said, with a plaintive but satisfied tone:

"Of course, my son, I can understand that they want you; and the advantages to you from the business training of such a man outweigh any regret I may feel at losing you, especially as I hope you will be here for New Year, and that to me remains a far more important day."

"Yes, Mother, I shall return by New Year."

"And on Christmas, what with the Sunday School tree and the church decorations and morning service and all, I should have little time to devote to you,

so it is all for the best," she continued with cheerful optimism. "When do you start?"

"This evening at eight o'clock."

"Then I will go at once and see about an early dinner." And she bustled importantly away, leaving Jeannie alone with her son. They had never been alone together since that scene in the studio, and the memory of it was strong in both their minds. She rose hurriedly.

"You have packing to do and I must go."

Her manner was just as usual, except that her voice had more than ever a little metallic ring, and that, as she held out her hand, she carefully avoided his eye.

"Wait a minute," Walter said abruptly, detaining her, "I have something I want to say." She winced, and her lips whitened. "You have thought over my suggestion about Arthur," he continued the more harshly because he felt her power gaining on him.

"Yes, oh, yes!" she murmured faintly.

"And you have become convinced, I hope, that I am right."

Jeannie sat down again as though hardly able to stand.

"Oh! you are right enough, Walter; you always are!" she said with a smile that showed her little white teeth, "but don't ask me to do it yet!" Her voice broke at this and she went on in breathless, gasping tones, "Give me a little more time; leave me one person who believes in me and gives me some reason to live!"

She ended suddenly, and put her hand to her throat as though stifling a sob.

"That is all right for you," Walter said gravely, almost coldly, "but how about him?"

"And how about you?" Jeannie exclaimed with an hysterical laugh. "Oh! do you think I don't see that it is Mrs. Sherwood who is always in your mind; that it is to see her that you are going to Erncliff; that it is on her account that you are so bitter against me!"

Walter started conscience-stricken at this sudden counter accusation. He was not a vain man, or there were other aspects of it which might have occurred to him, and it was fortunate that they did not, for they would have done Jeannie injustice. If the power of love is said to make the world go round, it would be equally true to say that the power of vanity holds it in its orbit. Jeannie had once boasted that no man had ever been long within her influence and remained unscathed, and to her it was a bitter blow that Walter should be the one exception. That was enough in itself to account for her accusing words.

"It is not a question here of me, or of Mrs. Sherwood," he said, rallying at last, "but of others."

"I know, I know, Walter, be merciful! You are happy to-night, why, is for you to say. Let me be happy too, it is only for a short time." And he was obliged to acquiesce, with a feeling of his own powerlessness, which many of Jeannie's admirers had suffered from before.

Indeed, on examining into his excessive self-satisfaction that evening, after he had finally entered the train, Walter was unable to find as much cause for it as he had supposed. Of course the appointment he had obtained was—as dealing with a railroad in difficulties—in the nature of a plum. He had applied for it, at the suggestion of an acquaintance, a man prominent in the committee to whom he had made his first report, the report which had been so satisfactory to Mr. Sherwood, and he had obtained it after much difficulty and competition. There was nothing to connect Charles Sherwood in any way with this, and yet—Walter had a faint, causeless spasm of dismay which he could not understand or fathom. He was much interested in the work entrusted to him, and had just come from an interview with the Chairman of the Committee, full of zeal in its cause. The exact nature of the report required of him need not detain us here, but the closing words of the interview are of interest: “Remember, Mr. Coffin, this whole affair is strictly confidential. We want not only a man of ability in his profession, but one who can hold his tongue. It is important that nothing should transpire of what I have told you, and there are many interested in knowing what you may have to report. We rely, therefore, on your absolute discretion.”

Walter had considered the reliance to be well founded as he bowed and took his leave. He thought of all this now with a faint qualm, but resolutely put it out of his mind. The important thing was that he was to visit Erncliffe and to see her there; to

spend a few days of happiness and then— Oh! what mattered the dim future so the immediate one was what it promised him to be?

During this time Arthur and Jeannie were seated together by the fire in her studio talking. It was long since they had thus passed an evening together. The result of the suspicions which had occurred to him on that never to be forgotten night had left their mark on Arthur. To be sure, he had determinedly and persistently tried to banish them from his mind, and had succeeded as far as the conscious portion of it was concerned; but beneath it, in that obscure subconscious realm, about which so much is spoken and so little is known, they lingered still, festering there like some unclean thing, perhaps a germ long dormant and ready at any moment to make itself known by bitter pain.

Arthur had not avoided Jeannie; he had only not seized, as heretofore, every opportunity of seeing her, and when he did see her he varied between excessive devotion and self-reproach at his injustice, and churlish and sullen suspicion of her every act and word. A more practical man would have ended this suspense at once by putting his suspicions of her to the test, and either confirm or annihilate them, but Arthur did nothing of the kind. His nature was at once confiding and perverse, and while he refused to acknowledge himself mistaken in his estimate of Jeannie, he preferred to live in a fool's paradise rather than risk all, even though constantly disturbed by fearful and fitful gleams of distrust.

This evening perhaps Walter's gaiety and light-

heartedness had affected him—for he had seen Walter for a few moments, after the latter's interview with Jeannie—or perhaps it was the Christmas feeling in the air; at any rate his mood was of the brightest when he joined her as she left Mrs. Coffin's, saying:

"Let us dine together to-night, Jeannie, and then go back to your studio and have a talk over the fire as we used to do."

Jeannie was only too willing, feeling as low in her mind as he was the reverse, and anxious as he for diversion, though for another cause. So they had a nice little dinner together in a small French restaurant, whose meals had the rare quality of suiting alike their purses and their palates, and later they returned to her studio. It was always at its best at night, when the dim light concealed its artistic disorder and brought into greater relief its faded picturesque quality. Even the pictures looked their best in this semi-darkness, the flashes of firelight showing their delicate beauty and casting shadows upon their sometimes garish colour and feeble drawing.

Jeannie sat down and threw off her coat, smiling up at him as she did so in a softly provocative way, which he was never able to resist. Her eyes shone, and her lithe, sinuous form twisted itself into the cushions of the chair with a kind of languorous grace. She felt that Arthur watched her and yet she turned away in seeming unconsciousness while she slowly stroked the fur collar of the coat she had taken off. The light in the studio was very dim; it came entirely from a pair of tall church candles on the mantel, so

that deep shadows reached across the floor to where a thin line of dust just showed in the corners of the room.

"It is cold here," Jeannie murmured, shivering a little; "put a few coals on the fire, will you, Arthur, dear."

Arthur turned his rapturous gaze from her face.

"Why, there are none!" he said as he looked in the box.

"No coals!" exclaimed Jeannie. "Oh! dear me, I remember now, I forgot to order any!"

"Let me get them," Arthur cried, glad of an opportunity to prove his devotion.

"No, it is too late now; it is no use," she answered with a sadly practical smile. "We shall have to make our enthusiasm keep us warm," and she put on her coat with her ready acceptance of the inevitable. She glanced up at Arthur approvingly as she did so, for there were periods when he attracted her strongly, and this was one. His unquestioning devotion had as ever a soothing influence on her, and though at times she accepted it as a matter of course, at others it afforded her unutterable satisfaction—perhaps because she was keen enough to recognise its value. Just now there came upon her a longing for some expression of his devotion, something to offset the sense of depression, which, whether as a result of the cold, or as a reflection of her former mood, had again seized upon her.

"I have times of feeling terribly discouraged!" she said wearily, "when my work does not satisfy me, or seem at all what I want it to be." She paused, ex-

pecting a dissent; but perhaps the cold had also affected Arthur, for he sat staring moodily at the empty grate, his former elation passing as suddenly as it had come. "Have you ever felt that way yourself?" asked Jeannie softly.

"I rarely feel otherwise," he answered. "Let me tell you, Jeannie, you are fortunate if you have only times of distrusting yourself; for me, I always do."

Much as she might regret that her companion's depression should coincide at this moment with her own, Jeannie was not impervious to this appeal.

"You must have more self-confidence!" she said, rousing herself with an effort.

"That is all very well," he answered, "for you who are sure of what is best and always follow it," glancing approvingly about him, with the perfect faith in her and the perfect ignorance of everything pertaining to her art, which Jeannie found so attractive.

"I follow it because I am sure of myself," she replied gently, "as you ought to be, for if you are not it argues a distrust of your own genius."

Arthur started up with a groan.

"My genius," he exclaimed bitterly, "how great it sounds, and am I sure that I possess a ray, nay, even a spark of it!" and he began to pace the floor. "I have begun to doubt lately, and my doubting is not the least bitter thing in the cup that I must drink." He paused and looked down darkly upon her. "I tell you, Jeannie, that when I compare what I have done, what the best of us have done, with

what the great men have accomplished who came before us, it all amounts to nothing! And then—"Arthur's face lightened—"suddenly, in my mind's eye, I see certain things so strongly, so powerfully, so intensely, that it seems to me as if every power were given me from on high; that my mind rushes to the heart of things; that I understand all and can express all; that nothing is hid from me; and then I write, I strive to pour it out in verse, to make others see and understand, to make good all the power that is within me! And then—when all is done it amounts to so little, so pitifully little, of what was there burning into my very soul. It always lacks the one thing, the little touch that would have made it great! And I look about me," went on Arthur, "and I do not meet it, that touch of greatness that, like one of nature, makes the whole world kin. Ah! it is not enough to think great thoughts, it is to express them, and to express them the thoughts of others must leap forth to meet and give them welcome! They say the times are out of joint. It is not the times which are at fault, it is the men! There is no feeling for great deeds; it is not about you in the air, in men's minds, clamouring for expression, longing for sympathy! I tell you, Jeannie, people are dead, asphyxiated by the foul breath of that foul Gorgon of wealth misnamed modern progress!"

Jeannie's tact was of the sort that rises at such appeals to genius. She divined a wound, in the same breath in which she applied a healing remedy; and

the secret of her power lay in this, that each man left her happier in his opinion, not of her only, but of himself.

"Oh! I have often, so often, felt the same!" she exclaimed. "That bitter want of sympathy for thoughts and feelings that I tried to express, and could not because of a lack of response. In painting it is just the same, no great work and recognition only for mediocrity! But never mind, Arthur, dear, do not let the coldness of others weigh upon you! Why should you care when there are kindred souls who know and appreciate you at your best, and glory in what you have done!"

She held out her hand, with her soft smile, and Arthur took it, with burning love and self-reproach for former doubts sweeping over him. How could he have been so brutal, so wicked, so heartless, as to distrust Jeannie, the one person in the whole world who appreciated and sympathised with him? He doubted no longer, Jeannie was as ever perfect to him, his dearest love, who had suffered wrong and injury and injustice from the world, and some day, some day soon perhaps, he, Arthur Hinsdale, would avenge her, and convince others, as he had himself, of her perfect purity and love!

Poor Arthur! he forgot at the moment that, so far as he knew, no one had accused Jeannie but himself; but he smiled, well satisfied, for had he not overcome his own suspicions and conquered them.

CHAPTER XIX

"Its passions will rock thee,
As the storm rocks the ravens on high."

SHELLEY.

IT was Christmas Day at Erndcliff, a beautiful, clear, wintry day, and the sun shining upon the brilliant light of the snow made almost a garish light, which blinded while it charmed the eye. The river was filled with great blocks of ice, which ebbed and flowed with the stream, pounding against the shore with a dull creaking motion. The snow was everywhere; over the tops of the pines; over the crests of the boulders lining the shore; over the evergreens in the Sherwoods' garden, bending down the tall box almost to the ground; piled high in drifts in every hollow, so that the hills seemed almost to vanish and everything appeared one burning white plain.

"Like a nice piece of frosted cake, is it not, Mamma?" Bennie asked, clinging to her hand, as they returned home on that Christmas afternoon. As we have said, Mrs. Sherwood contributed every year gifts for the children at Erndcliff, and the tree was held in the church in memory of her father, who had always attended there. A "sentimental extravagance" Elizabeth called it, but she had not ventured to interfere. On this occasion Jack had been in attendance, rather sulky but meek withal, and much on

his good behaviour, since an interview with his father in which Mr. Sherwood had spoken with unusual plainness. Jack objected the less to this, because at the end permission was granted him to make the coveted trip after big game, and he was so filled with enthusiasm over this project that he was easily induced to relinquish his very objectionable pursuit of Elizabeth's *bête-noire*, the woman whom nobody knew. Indeed the alacrity with which he gave her up was only equalled by the suddenness with which she had attracted him. As his wife had rightly said, everything was transient with Jack, even his pleasures.

On this occasion he looked and felt much of a martyr, though he had performed his share, of what was expected of him, with a very proper show of spirit.

"He is a poor sort and ain't got much sense, but he has the gift of gab all right," said Mrs. Baker, with her usual plain spokenness, as she watched him.

"He is a very proper behaved young gentleman and an example to all our young men in the fit of his clothes," said the grocer's wife.

"Fine feathers don't make fine birds, and, for my part, I'd sooner hev a husband who could use his head than his heels any day; and by all accounts all this one's good for is to lead a dance they call a cotillion and to skate a figure eight on the ice."

Now this was unjust to Jack, in that it omitted several of his accomplishments; his proficiency in polo, for instance, as well as in shooting and bil-

liards, but Mrs. Baker, as an acknowledged wit, must be allowed some latitude of speech.

However, the ceremony was over, and Jack, with much self pity, was preparing to follow his wife and son to the house when he spied one of his erstwhile companions leaning against a tree. Job Bates, the carpenter's son, was the great sport of the village and an authority on all matters thereto pertaining, and Jack hailed him with alacrity.

"I will follow you later, Isabel. I must have a talk with Job," he called out, and she went on, dragging the reluctant Bennie after her.

"Mamma," said the latter, panting a little at her quick pace, "Mamma, are we hurrying so to meet Mr. Coffin?"

"To meet Mr. Coffin? What can have put such an idea into your head!" answered his mother with unusual sharpness. "I don't even know when Mr. Coffin will be here."

"But-I do," said Bennie. "I heard Grandpa say the four o'clock train, and it must be later than that now, isn't it, Mamma?"

No reply.

"Isn't that Mr. Coffin now?" pointing to a figure slowly mounting the hill and coming toward them.

It was indeed Walter, and he had had to work hard to make his return possible, but he had accomplished it, and he would cheerfully have worked every hour of the twenty-four to finish his allotted task in time and bring him back to her. He did not so put it to himself, he only thought that civility required that he should spend Christmas at Erncliffe as he had

promised. But now he was here, he was at her side, he was holding her hand, as he said: "Merry Christmas, Mrs. Sherwood!"

"Merry Christmas!" she answered. "You came very near missing it entirely."

"I know, I have travelled for dear life, and now at the eleventh hour I am here."

He walked beside her, radiant, beaming; his head held high; his breath coming in quick joyous gasps; looking the delight in her presence which he could not put into words; and she watched him, a faint smile lurking in the corners of her mouth. For the moment Walter was no longer master of himself, a sudden wave of passion swept over him, as inconsequent as the ghost of Banquo among the revellers at the king's feast. For a time it turned him giddy, and made everything look black before his eyes, while through the surging in his ears he seemed to hear his own voice, speaking words of warning to Arthur Hinsdale:

"No woman shall ever come between me and my career!"

And gradually his sight and hearing came back, and he was able to hear Bennie's high-pitched voice saying:

"We have been giving the people here a tree, Mr. Coffin. Mamma likes everybody to have a merry time at Christmas."

He turned to her almost fiercely.

"Is that true?"

"Why, of course! It does not strike me as such a wonderful condescension on my part."

She spoke in her usual light tone, but through it ran a vein of startled bewilderment, as she met the expression in his eyes. They changed almost immediately, however, and became suddenly soft and pleading.

"Then if you feel so, give me this Christmas, Mrs. Sherwood. I will count it as a white letter day in my life. Let me, too, be merry for once."

She glanced at him oddly, deprecatingly, struggling with her embarrassment; her manner at once softened and repellent, but the emotion which had for a moment distorted his features had passed, leaving no trace of its presence. Isabel's smile deepened, and she went on with a laugh that expressed at once disappointment and relief.

"Merry, I love the word. It always brings up to me the England of Elizabeth's day, before Puritans and persecutions had taken the heart out of life; when people really were merry, and the world really was young."

He did not answer directly; but continued to look at her in the same grave, enquiring way, taking in everything about her from her fur cap to the overshoes protecting her feet from the snow. It was a glance which lingered over her like a caress; but yet his gaze was almost brotherly in his calm absorbed friendliness.

They were interrupted at this moment by Elizabeth, who appeared on one of the paths, leading from the road where they were, to the house, and who said, with unusual graciousness:

"Merry Christmas, Mr. Coffin! I want to thank

you, for the very beautiful flowers I have just received. Flowers at Christmas time are a pleasure as well as a luxury."

Had not a gust of wind at this moment blown the snow into Elizabeth's eyes she must have noticed his start and the expression of amazement which overspread his face. The explanation of her words had flashed immediately upon him, as he cursed the florist, who instead of Mrs. had misread Miss, and so changed the destination of his very expensive gift. For a moment he started to speak, to explain, and the next he caught Isabel's eye and saw that she knew. He saw too that she begged him to be silent, and he obeyed, while Elizabeth went on well pleased, brushing the snow away.

"Had you a pleasant journey, Mr. Coffin? You arrived too late for the tree. It is fortunate that you are in time for the Christmas dinner."

"I am as fortunate in that as I am unfortunate in other things," he answered, with a half look at Isabel's face, who with difficulty repressed a smile. Indeed, Walter himself, in spite of his vexation, could not find it in his heart to be angry at the mistake, considering Elizabeth's delight and the practical advantages which he gained from her friendliness. Her pleasure at receiving the flowers was only equalled by her pleasure at Isabel's supposed discomfort, and the two facts made her mood so cheerful that the whole household experienced its influence, even Toodles, shrinking from her in terror, received only a gentle "Get out of my way, doggie," instead of the usual abuse.

"I see I need not explain the mistake," Walter said, after she had preceded them into the house.

"I take the will for the deed," answered Isabel lightly. "Thank you just the same for the flowers; but let her have the pleasure of thinking they were for her, I can look at them all the same."

This showed not quite the angelic sweetness to which Walter attributed it, but rather a very strong realisation of her sister-in-law's power in the household, which had he appreciated better would have made him deem his gift only too well bestowed. However, he submitted with a wry face to much praise of the flowers, and the gift to Isabel of one American Beauty rose, which the latter accepted most amicably, though to Walter it hardly seemed offered in the same spirit.

The hall looked to him unusually imposing, when he descended the stairway that evening. The tapestry curtains, which usually disfigured it, had been removed by Elizabeth for fear of injury from the Christmas decorations, so that it loomed up now in all its majestic proportions. Unlike its modern successors, it had great height of ceiling to offset its huge dimensions and it therefore made an impression of vastness commensurate with its size. It mattered little that the ceiling was Renaissance and the side walls Georgian, the ivory white of their colouring blended the two styles together, and brought out the green of the Christmas garlands, and the rich black of the oak furniture. At other times it might all appear dull and gloomy, lacking in perspective and failing in quality; but in the brilliant light of a hundred can-

dles blazing on the distant Christmas tree, all defects vanished, and it suddenly acquired charm.

To Walter Isabel was its presiding spirit and she looked and seemed the incarnation of Christmas. She had bound a wreath of laurel about her hair and wore a bunch in the bodice of her dress, and looking at her, he felt inclined to echo Bennie's remark.

"You are like the angel in the Christmas tree, Mamma; all red and green and white."

"Thanks, Bennie, for the compliment," she said, kissing him, and he departed, well pleased, to bed.

Walter came up to her there, as she stood a little apart, fastening the holly in her dress, and said to her in a strange abrupt tone:

"Give me a piece of that in memory of to-day."

She glanced up at him with a movement half haughty, half coquettish, which changed a little as she saw the expression of his face when she asked:

"Now why should I?"

"Because it can do you no harm, and it means everything to me. Give it to me; it is Christmas day!" and as he spoke his eyes held her and she watched him with a look of half fascinated surprise; while slowly, reluctantly, and as if against her will, she broke off a piece of the holly she wore and handed it to him. He took it as silently and fastened it in his coat. That was all; but he left her with a smile of gladness that transfigured his face; and she stared after him, repelled, attracted; but above all strangely moved.

The Christmas party consisted of the immediate family (not including Catherine, who never took the

children to the country in the winter for fear they might catch cold); a friend of Jack's, with little save a proficiency at bridge to recommend him; and a pretty young cousin, the same débutante who had once before been consigned to Walter's care at dinner. It was fortunate for him that he had the grace to recall that circumstance with open expressions of pleasure, and that Elizabeth's sharp eyes were for the time blinded by a compliment, otherwise his state of mind could hardly fail to have been noted and commented upon, while now it remained unnoticed by all save Mr. Sherwood.

Walter was beginning to awaken himself to the fact that what had been at first a mere passing fancy, and later a sentiment to trifle with, had now become an absorbing passion. The discovery of this fact caused him no surprise, nor did it even fill him with dismay—the time for that would come later—he only felt a sense of overwhelming happiness and elation. To be again with Isabel, and feast his eyes upon her, and sometimes speak to her and always remain beside her, that was sufficient for the present; and for the future, it would all come right in the end! It could not fail to do so, given his great love! It was a proof of how utterly changed Walter was that, at the time, he failed to see the unutterable absurdity of this reasoning, and that during the many sleepless nights that he spent he failed to think of himself at all, or of aught but Isabel. It was the first strong, unselfish passion that he had ever felt, and it racked him like a fierce hurricane, which, passing over a fair landscape, leaves a wreck of uprooted trees, torn branches

and broken flowers behind. So it was with Walter's nature, changed, distorted and broken by the savage strength of a great love.

Mr. Sherwood noted somewhat of this, but he made no sign. He had a firm belief in Isabel's coldness, and her husband's perversity, and it was his mistaken idea that with Jack to arouse jealousy was to arouse love; the fact being that Jack was alike incapable of either.

Jack was quite in his element now, organising coasting parties, clearing the pond for skating, teaching the others how to ski, and last, but not least, discussing plans for his projected journey. He had no time or thought for his wife, and she felt relief at his improved health and spirits. What her own thoughts were Isabel kept to herself, and no one knew or perhaps cared, save Walter watching her with fierce devouring eyes, or her horse, whom she rode daily and who perhaps might have repeated some of the things which she whispered to him.

CHAPTER XX

"Love art thou sweet? then bitter death must be
Love thou art bitter; sweet is death to me;
O love if death be sweeter, let me die."

TENNYSON—"Lancelot and Elaine."

IT was the third day of Walter's stay. The morning had been bright and sunny, and had been spent by them all in skating. In the early afternoon the weather clouded, and most of the party were glad to gather about the library fire, where Jack detained his brother-in-law and Walter in a long discussion of plans for the projected journey. Walter was at the less pains to keep his mind upon them because Isabel was not present. She had gone to her room after luncheon and had not joined the others again. Later,—when the discussion was over and the men adjourned to the billiard room, and the ladies each to their own in quest of beauty sleep,—Walter was left free to betake himself to the terrace. It bore little resemblance to the first time he had visited it, and being noted as the most wind-swept spot on the estate, was hardly a pleasant lounging place, but it suited his mood. The sky was dull and overcast, broken at times by fitful gleams of light, when the clouds which overspread the sun parted for a moment and allowed it to appear. The wind howled among the leafless trees with a dull wailing

sound, a sound infinitely depressing to hear. It whirled the snow in gusts over everything, blinding the eyes so that at times it was impossible to see beyond one's face. The river too was gradually becoming invisible behind an impenetrable veil of mist, which rose from it like smoke from off a fire, and the only sign of its presence was the creaking and groaning of the ice against its shores. There was every sign and warning of a storm, and it seemed as if striving to make that warning felt to Walter's ears.

"Have you seen Isabel lately?" said a voice behind him, and turning he beheld Mr. Sherwood on the piazza.

"Not since luncheon," Walter answered, hastening toward him. "You do not mean that she is out in this gale."

"Yes, unless she has returned. I saw her mount her horse about an hour ago and take the road to the old mill. I have not seen her come back."

Walter was hurriedly buttoning up his coat.

"I will go for her, Mr. Sherwood. It is no fit weather for her to be out on horseback in these hills. If the horse slipped on the ice under the loose snow she might have an ugly fall."

He did not wait for the answer, but set off hurriedly in the direction indicated, finding a sort of odd pleasure in his fight with the storm; for the wind was rising rapidly now, increasing in volume at every moment, and the snow was falling too, at first softly and quietly and then more furiously, sending myriads of tiny snow flakes, sharp and stinging as nettles, into Walter's face. It seemed to him that there was

also a curious quality about the air, not so much that it was cold as that it was rarefied beyond the point where he could breathe, and at times indeed he stopped and panted for breath. Many a dweller on the Hudson has had a like experience in these storms, coming direct from the North Pole and going no one knows where; as the wind swirls the snow until all sense of direction is lost.

Walter hardly knew what he feared or what he looked for, as he hurried on, past the spot where he had once before stopped with Isabel to admire the view; past the railroad bridge, in part his own handiwork; struggling on fiercely, blindly, wildly, fighting the storm and his own fears. The wind had now risen almost to a gale, hurling itself in relentless gusts against him and, at every step, impeding his progress; but he felt a kind of savage satisfaction in its wrath. He was at home in it; it suited his mood; where a similar storm was raging, tearing down before it everything, which until now, he had held most dear. Again the wind sounded; at first a dull hoarse roar; increasing gradually into a groan; and then rising crescendo like unto a shriek of pain; which died at last into a wail—a silence and then howls of defiant rage expressing his own feelings! It was as if an iron band which until then had held his consciousness together had snapped suddenly; leaving him free, for the first time in his life, to express them; to be for once just what he actually was. He had a sense of an untrammelled nature surging up within him, such as a savage might feel, when, under the influence of a mighty rage, he regards neither

danger nor fear. He loved her; she was his and he would save her—if it was against all the powers of hell! And with this a rush of unselfish tenderness towards her swept over him; a wish to shield her, to sacrifice himself, which was so strange and so foreign to his nature that the very idea of it sobered him. He felt that nothing else mattered, that he belonged to her body and soul to do with as she would, and that the force which was tearing him asunder, destroying for the moment every thought of self, was as pure, though as relentless, as the wind which now shook him from head to foot.

At last he saw the "Old Mill" rise before him, and it seemed to him, looking at it through the blinding snow, that there was something dark there which had life and moved, and that some voice which might be hers called to him from within. A fierce struggle with the now raging storm brought him at last beside it, and he was able to discern the partially ruined structure, preserved as a relic, but fortunately presenting a shelter from the gale, and in its doorway a white figure, who had Isabel's face and smile and whose voice he now knew to be hers.

"Thank Heaven that you are here!" he said, staggering within and facing her with a pale face, staring eyes and shaking limbs.

"Now why should you thank Heaven for finding me just where you came to look for me?" she answered, smiling to hide the embarrassment that she felt.

"Because I was afraid you were lost in the snow." He was pulling himself together now, and glancing

about him—with eyes still dazed from the effects of the snow and his own fears—he perceived in one corner of the building a horse, his leg comfortably banded with Isabel's muffler, complacently munching an evergreen bough.

"He slipped and twisted his foot on the ice," she said, stroking the horse's neck, "and as I dared not lead him back alone in this storm, I came in here to wait for a rescue."

"And how long did you think it might be before it came?" he asked, surprise at her coolness mingling with indignation at what he had suffered.

"Oh! I knew parties would set out at sundown when I did not return, only," and she raised her eyes and looked at him for the first time—"you came first!"

He drew near and his eyes burnt into her face while his impassive features twitched strangely, and she could almost feel his quick breathing, as he said:

"You were right to expect me; but come, we should start at once, before it grows worse."

"It would be impossible for us to start just now, leading a lame horse," she answered. "Listen!"

They could hear the wind howling, like a pack of famished wolves, scenting their prey. Walter could almost distinguish their sharp cries, as they tracked it, with hideous gloating snarls of joy; then a crash—a capture while maniac sounds of rage and triumph swept up from the river—then a clash of discordant noises; a sharp crunching as of devouring teeth; and then bellows of wrath as though the suddenly loosened fangs had turned against each other—after that si-

lence—and then low diminishing howls as the pack swept by.

"Wait a little," Isabel said, "the wind is apt to go down about sunset, and they may relieve us before then."

"We could leave the horse here and send back for him," he hazarded.

"Never, I will not even consider such a thing!"

He stared, amazed both at her calmness and her obstinacy, and observing her more closely, he saw that she was shivering and that her teeth were nearly chattering from the cold, and in an instant he had torn off his coat and thrown it about her.

"What is this?" she asked, almost resentfully. "I am not really cold, and you will be frozen without your coat."

He stood before her bareheaded, in his light tweed suit and knickerbockers, while the snow upon his hair and eyebrows melted slowly above his flushed face; and his eyes gleamed with fever, as he laughed and held out his hand, saying:

"Cold! feel whether I am," and his touch almost burnt her.

"I tell you, Mrs. Sherwood, I am as cold as I was that day in South Africa when we made a forced march in the tropic sun, burning with fever and attacked by savages, yet thinking only of guarding our treasure—it was diamonds—to a place of safety."

And as she watched him, standing there amid the howling gale, she felt a species of terror seize her, the terror inspired by any vital elemental passion when seen for the first time. Assuredly Isabel had not

lived all these years in New York without having had love made to her by other men in various ways, but this was different.

He smiled as he saw her face.

"Do not be frightened, I am not mad, as you seem to think; or if I am it is caused by fear."

"By fear!"

"Yes, the fear of danger to you! I have never felt it before, the sensation of sheer blind terror which I experienced on my way here, and I no longer blame a coward, for I can sympathise with him!"

He put out his hand again, and drawing his coat carefully about her he buttoned it at the throat, saying, with the same curious smile: "You know I have been through all the agony of losing you, do you wonder that it upset me?"

"But why?" she managed to say, finding at last a voice, though a feeble one, "why should you fear for me, just because of a storm?"

"I suppose because I realised at the same time what your loss and a storm meant," he said in the same tone, the tone she had once heard from a man who had saved his wife, though he had seen his house burn down before his eyes. What was it which had been destroyed as by fire in Walter's case, she wondered, as she watched him go over to the horse and examine his hurt.

"It is not a very bad sprain," he said, returning to her, "and I think between us we can lead him home. But perhaps it would be wiser to wait for a lull in the storm, as you suggest, for you know this place better than I."

As if in answer to this, another fierce blast of wind struck the frail structure, shaking it as though it had been some living thing which interfered with its wrath, and then loosing it, hurled itself forward to work havoc in the valley below.

"Wait," Isabel answered, rising and approaching the door, "I see a rift in the clouds; before long we shall be able to go on."

For the wind was lessening now and the snow, too, was falling less steadily, coming down like a soft white shroud, which choked instead of stabbing its victims as before. Everywhere as far as they could see, it was drifting down upon them, like a fog at sea, or the salt spray, from the waves on the beach, during a storm. Everywhere as far as they could see it was about them, strangling them; exuding from the sky, until the very air that they breathed, seemed to have turned into snow. The trees had faded into dark shadows; the roads had vanished; even the river itself had been swallowed up; smothered, engulfed, beneath the white pulpy mass.

"I think the wind has spent itself for the present," Isabel said.

She was right, and in a short time they were able to set out, making a strange trio as they started on their homeward way, leading between them the horse, alike the cause and victim of their plight. Isabel had dropped her hat at the time of the accident, and had forgotten it in her efforts to reach a place of safety, and the snow had frozen on her hair, giving to her face almost a ghost-like appearance. She had discarded Walter's coat, and scorning to wear it he

had thrown it over the horse's back and walked beside it, an erect figure, with burning cheeks which the icicles formed by his breath refused to cool.

Sometimes the horse tripped and they went down with him into a drift of snow; rising and hardly troubling to shake it off, they staggered on; Isabel's one thought to quiet the horse by her voice and touch; Walter's one thought for her. The time finally came when that thought was put to the proof, for though she was vigorous and strong and accustomed to hard exercise in rough weather, yet the strain on her had been great, and she was encumbered too with her habit, which made walking in the rough snow doubly difficult. And just as she felt her strength failing her, the wind rose again with renewed violence, fierce, relentless, striking down everything in its path. Without a word, Walter lifted her on to the horse and wrapped his coat about her.

"It is the only way," he said authoritatively, in answer to a faint remonstrance. "Drive him carefully and keep up his head. I will manage the rest. Had you been willing, it would have been the best plan from the first." And they staggered on.

At last there came a time when she could hardly see or hear and but just breathe, so fierce was the gale, so piercing the cold, so great the noise of the storm. She could just keep her seat on the horse, steady him when he slipped, lift his head as he fell, and pray that his strength would hold out. But through it all she felt Walter's hand upon her own, felt his arm sustaining her, heard his voice between

the gusts saying to her, "Do not worry. I will take care of you."

Once they were almost buried beneath a drift just at the moment when the wind struck them, and he had held her for an instant in his arms with her head pressed against him as he whispered, "It would be good to die so," and she had echoed his prayer in her heart—but the next moment he had managed to extricate them, and they staggered on.

That was the climax, for soon afterwards they were met by a party starting to their rescue, composed of two cutters containing the coachman and several grooms. They had been sent by Mr. Sherwood, but had wasted time by taking the wrong turn, and would have done so again but that they came upon the objects of their search.

"Thank Heaven as we found you now or we never should on such a night!" the fat coachman was saying as Isabel recovered her breath and the power of speech. "And I suppose, Ma'am, the poor beast is almost dead," touching the horse lovingly.

"Take good care of him, Powers," she urged as she was lifted into the sleigh and Walter followed and took the place at her side.

CHAPTER XXI

"Reason the root, fair faith is but the flower.

The fading flower shall die; but reason lives Immortal."

YOUNG'S "Night Thoughts."

THE party at home had at first taken scant heed of the storm, for a game of billiards absorbed the men, and the women were presumably resting. It was only later when they gathered in the library—which was on the sheltered side of the house—and there was talk of tea, that Jack exclaimed:

"Why, it is beginning to look like a baby blizzard!" and Margaret asked, "Where is Isabel?" And "Where is Mr. Coffin?" demanded Elizabeth, and added sarcastically, "They have perhaps gone for a walk!"

"No, by Jove, it is not possible!" said Jack, "that would be too foolish!" and he added to the butler who entered just then with tea, "Have you seen Mrs. Sherwood?"

"Mrs. Sherwood have gone out on horseback, Sir, and Mr. Sherwood have sent Mr. Coffin after her, and afterwards Powers and the groom. It is an awful night, Sir," he replied with majestic satisfaction at the impression he produced.

"Gone out on horseback! How crazy!" cried Jack.

"It would not be Isabel if she were not late for tea!" said Elizabeth.

"I hope nothing has happened to her!" exclaimed Margaret.

"Nonsense! What could happen to her?" continued Elizabeth, beginning to make tea. "It is most inconsiderate of my father to send Mr. Coffin out in such weather! Oh! here he is. Lemon or cream, Father?"

"Lemon, please."

"What is all this about Isabel?" asked Jack, returning from the window, where to do him justice he could get little idea of the storm. "I hear she was foolish enough to go out on horseback."

"Yes, I was a little concerned about her being alone in such weather," said his father; "so as Mr. Coffin offered to go I sent him, and when it grew worse, Powers in the cutter. They ought to be back by this time."

Jack looked irresolutely from the windows to the tea table, for the game had been exciting and he was hungry.

"Perhaps I had better—" he began.

"Nonsense!" said Elizabeth sharply. "Jack, you are in time for once; at least drink your tea before you go!"

"It might be wiser," he muttered, helping himself to buttered toast.

"It is a bad night. I hope she will not take cold," observed Margaret in her newly acquired character of sympathetic onlooker.

"Margaret, you have grown into a perfect prophet of evil! What has gotten into you lately?"

"I do not know but she is right," said Henry

Corning, rousing himself from his book to look out of the window. "It looks like a blizzard. Hurry, Jack, and we will all go."

"Yes. Let us make up a rescue party and go out after her," said his friend Ned Foster with zest, to the little *débutante* who nodded back to him with interest.

"That will be useless now," replied Mr. Sherwood coldly. "Here she is!" And the next moment the door was flung open, and Isabel and her faithful squire entered, followed by the butler majestically sympathetic, and attended at a respectful distance by a group of anxious domestics, whom Powers' account had filled with horrified interest.

Unfortunately that account had not reached the library, and the contrast which it presented was certainly striking to the two who had fought their way there through the storm. To them it argued callous brutality in its occupants, to find them calmly drinking tea; and unaware of the sacrifice contemplated by Jack and Henry Corning and of Margaret's sympathy, they felt themselves strangely neglected and as if they had been abandoned to their fate.

"I was beginning to get a little anxious about you," said Mr. Sherwood quietly. "Powers was a long time finding you."

"Yes, he lost his way," answered Walter, again taking the words out of her mouth, "and the horse sprained his foot, so we had some difficulty in getting home."

"By Jove, you both look it!" broke in Jack pleas-

antly. "Here, Isabel, let me wipe your hair. You are covered with icicles like a snow queen."

"Be careful the water does not drop on the furniture," said Elizabeth.

"The furniture will not matter for once!" interrupted Mr. Sherwood with unaccustomed sharpness. "Sit down, Isabel, and drink this." *This* was raw whiskey, and somewhat brought back the colour to her cheeks as Margaret put a shawl about her.

"I think I will go to my room now," she said, rising. "We had rather a rough time coming home, and if you do not mind, Elizabeth, I will have my dinner in bed, for I feel a bit done up."

"The best thing," Mr. Sherwood answered for his daughter. "Go at once. Mr. Coffin will relate your adventures."

And so it happened that after Isabel's departure her family heard a vague and guarded account of the events of the afternoon, which account did more credit to Walter's discretion than to his powers of narrative.

Isabel, in her own room, felt like a battered wreck which has only made port after a life and death struggle with a gale; except that in her case the storm within far outweighed the one without. She dared not dwell upon it; but strove instead to fix her mind on her own discomforts and her attempts to alleviate them. Her hair was caked with snow and ice, which, melting in the heat of the room, gave her somewhat the appearance of an Undine, while she herself was wet to the skin and so chilled from exposure as to require almost the same thawing proc-

ess. Yet all the while it seemed to her that her blood was on fire, and it was only with reluctance that she endured the efforts of her maid, by rubbing and hot applications, to restore her to a more normal temperature. Even after everything possible had been done and every comfort provided, she found that she had lost all taste for food as well as all desire for company.

"Sleep is all I need," she answered to every anxious inquiry; but she knew at the time that no sleep would come to her, and that she but craved solitude in which to go over again the events of the last few hours.

She drew a chair to the fire and crouched before it, while scenes and pictures began to shape themselves in her mind, and she felt again the sharp sting of the snow against her face, and the surging of the wind and the icy chill of the blast; but through it all she could see—only him.

She saw him first at a distance, fighting his way to her through the snow, or at bay with his hand held out to her crying, "Cold! Feel if I am." And she felt again the touch of his hand which had suddenly brought back the warmth to her heart. And it seemed to her that her strength was failing, and she grew too numb to move, and she felt now the touch of his arm about her, and of his face against hers, and of his breath upon her cheek—and at this she started up violently and began to pace the room, while over her surged wave after wave of feeling, so sudden and violent that she sank under it as she had sunk under the force of the storm.

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She beat her hands together and words formed themselves in her mind and fell unconsciously from her lips.

"I love him! I love him; I cannot give him up! It is too much! I have borne all I can!"

She flung herself down by the bed with her face hidden, trying to shut him out; but she could still hear his voice speaking—speaking to her this time about "his treasure."

"He means me! I am his treasure now," she moaned, and then starting up, "and where is mine?"

She went back again to the fire and sat before it, struggling for calmness.

"I must try to remember," she repeated. "I must think of it. I must realise what it means to me; the jewel of my soul!" But to her horror she felt that its meaning was slipping from her; that she was losing the very sense of its value; that she no *longer cared!* And she pressed her hand over her eyes murmuring, "That is the awful part, that I cannot even remember how I used to feel."

And even as she thought this, suddenly the scene in the drawing-room rose before her mind and she saw them still there, drinking tea while she struggled with the storm.

"And they would do it, even if I were dying," she said to herself, "and that is my world!" Then suddenly with almost a cry, "And it is to people like that I would sacrifice—his love. Oh! what do I care what they say, or do, or think about me! What does anything in the world matter if he loves me! I will not give him up. If one of us must pay the price,

let it be me. I will pay! Let the loss be mine!"

And she started up with burning cheeks and blazing eyes; her heart aflame; her blood on fire; feeling for one perfect moment the absorbing strength of a great love! And while she stood there transfigured, suddenly she seemed to see gliding toward her the little figure of a child—her boy, Bennie! And she wrung her hands together, calling out: "Oh! I knew there was a reason, and he has come to remind me because I had forgotten!" And the snow seemed to fall again and hide the vision from her, and she struggled to shake it off, to free herself, to reach her child, to save him from some threatening danger; but his form eluded her; it vanished; it refused to stay, and she was left alone again, fighting, fighting the storm and her own thoughts!

CHAPTER XXII

"And thus he bore without abuse
The grand old name of gentleman."

TENNYSON—"Merlin and Vivian."

THE snow fell steadily all that night, as the blizzard raged and howled about the house; but as morning broke, it had spent its force and retired at last, as it had come, quietly and with what seemed a benediction.

The house-party at Erneliff were a trifle subdued at breakfast that morning, all prospect of winter sports having been destroyed by the snow, with the counter prospect of being detained where they were by the impossibility of getting away. No trains were running; the telegraph and telephone wires were down; and drifts mountain high crossed the road that led to the village. Active life had in a measure been cut short at one blow.

Walter looked a little pale and tired, though otherwise no worse for his adventure; but in his case an almost morose gloom had succeeded to his exaltation of the night before. The reaction had set in, and if he did not yet fully realise the difficulties and danger of his position, he at least felt to the full its discouraging and numbing effects.

As soon as civility permitted, he had intended to

retire to his room and work on his report, which his haste to reach Erneliff had so far prevented his finishing. It was not due to be presented to the Committee until the following week; but mindful of the hint he had received, he had never failed to carry his more important notes upon his person. No reference to the matter had been made in any way by Mr. Sherwood; but this morning, as Walter crossed the hall on his way upstairs, the former said to him:

"Come into my study and smoke your cigar, Mr. Coffin. We can talk better there," and Walter had no choice but to comply.

Mr. Sherwood's study was as bare as the rest of the house was ornate, and more resembled the sitting-room of some favoured domestic than the sanctum sanctorum of its master. It faced east and had therefore no river view, its only compensation being a small piazza—overlooking the terrace edged with evergreens—on which it opened, and where Mr. Sherwood often sat when driven from the library either by guests or family discussions. It was plainly panelled in white and contained absolutely nothing of any moment save a bookcase filled with railroad reports, a large office desk and one comfortable chair, which Mr. Sherwood took himself, motioning his guest to sit opposite him, as he asked:

"And how about your report? Have you finished it?"

"Very nearly," replied Walter, his worst fears verified.

"It is a most interesting question, the reorganisa-

tion of that road," went on Mr. Sherwood. "I am rather interested in it myself. I suppose you know the history of it?"

"Only partially."

"It is this. It was a small road running through a fairly populated part of the South, and had it been properly managed it might have proved both a profitable investment and a benefit to the community, while as you know, it failed in both."

"Yes."

"Well, I was a large stockholder then, and I fought hard for control, with the crowd who are now running it, for several years; and at last I got out and left it to its fate. Some of my friends were not so fortunate, and when the crash came they were forced, to avoid being frozen out, to sign over their rights to a committee they distrusted, and not without cause."

"In what way?"

"They have reason to think that an attempt is to be made to undervalue the road so it may be sold to a syndicate for much less than it is worth; the members of the Committee to receive their compensation in new stock, and the bondholders not in the deal to be the sufferers. It was then," continued Mr. Sherwood calmly, "that we bethought ourselves of you and succeeded in having you appointed to your present post. With the information that you can furnish me I shall be able to make a bid myself, and my friends can force the committee to come to terms with me by threatening exposure of their former plan."

"Why can they not do that now if they have any proof of bad faith?"

"Because I am not sufficiently familiar with the true condition of affairs there at present to name my price. I want control of it because of another in which I am interested, but I will not act in the dark. I must know everything about it through you, Mr. Coffin."

"Through me? And what if I refuse?"

"You will not do this, for several reasons: first, because your own sense of justice will show you that you owe allegiance to the people who procured your appointment rather than to those who are your official employers; second, your English love of fair play will make you wish to thwart a scheme to defraud the bondholders; and third, you do not strike me as being indifferent to your own interest, and your interest demands that you grant my request."

"Because if I do not?"

"If you do not, I may be obliged to use the influence which I have, and it is a large one, against you instead of, as formerly, in your favour; that is all."

"I see. Will you allow me to think the matter over, Mr. Sherwood? It is rather an important one and demands careful consideration on my part."

"Certainly. Take your own time; there is no hurry. I am positive that you will see it as I do in the end."

And he bowed and Walter left him.

Walter went to his room after this, but with no further intention of working on his report, though he seated himself mechanically at the desk and, draw-

ing a sheet of paper before him, dipped his pen in the ink. It seemed to him that his brain refused to work properly. He said to himself several times that he was face to face with a decision, but his mind would not dwell upon it. It insisted instead of making pictures for him of every event connecting him with Isabel: of her face, the first time he had met her, and her voice, as she had said:

"It must be a pleasant thing to earn your living in a way that is useful to other people!"

"Yes, it is a very pleasant thing," he answered her now with a bitter laugh.

How she had looked that evening when he had dined at Erneliff and had asked her what she considered a strong man!

"A strong man is one who allows nothing to stand in his way, except pity for the weak."

"I will be a strong man!" he answered her now, and to prove it he idly drew diagrams on the paper before him.

Assuredly the power of a woman's words are as magic to a man who loves her, and Walter kept hearing her voice now whispering to him:

"Do not be afraid of my father-in-law."

"I am not," he said to himself, and yet he recognised only too well the hand of steel under the velvet glove. He knew, no one better, that with this enmity behind him, it would be impossible for him to obtain employment in New York. Once he would have laughed at such a contingency, saying gaily, "If so, I can go elsewhere!" but now the mere prospect of it filled him with absolute terror, for to leave New

York meant to leave Isabel, and at the thought he uttered an imprecation as he got up and began to walk about the room. Half audible words escaped from him from time to time, and he seemed to be berating some one, though whether himself or Mr. Sherwood or fate, he would have found it hard to say.

But at last he was back again at the desk, with the pen in his hand and the sheet of paper still before him with its unfinished diagram.

"I must think it out calmly," he said to himself for the second time; but he only seemed to hear her voice saying to him:

"I am always in extremes like the Puritans, but you can be depended on to see things as they are."

Yes, he always had done so, and had he lost that power now? Apparently not, for as he went over again Mr. Sherwood's course of reasoning, suddenly the sophistry in it seemed to disappear and he saw only the naked truth standing out before him.

What was it they wanted him to do? Betray a trust! That was the true statement of fact, stripped of all verbiage. For Walter was not deceived by accounts of defrauded bondholders and fraudulent designs; he knew enough of conditions there to rate them at their true value. No, it was a hand to hand fight for control of that road, in which neither side balked at any means to be employed. The only thing still dark to his mind was how he had been forced into the game, but it illustrated to him Mr. Sherwood's unbounded power.

"He can crush me in one hand as though I were

a useless twig," he said to himself as he remembered his mother's injunction.

"Do try, Walter, and do just what Mr. Sherwood tells you and you will get on!"

"Poor little Mother, she does not understand; but I am a man, and I do." And then he fell to thinking of his father.

The tie between them had been a very strong one, though few seeing them together would have supposed it was. With Walter there was great pride in his father and unbounded reliance on his judgment, though the fact that they belonged to different generations and looked with such different eyes on many things tended to make their intercourse a little forced and formal. The truth was that Captain Coffin adored his son, though he never allowed it to appear, and had transferred to him much of the idealising affection with which he had in former years adorned his wife. He had even sacrificed to please him all his own plans for Walter's future and had said to him almost the last time they had met:

"I have always regretted, Walter, that you did not see your way to be a sailor, but your own career now seems to be assured. Do not forget, though, wherever you are, that you are a gentleman, and never do anything unworthy of it."

He had smiled a little at the time at the old-fashioned injunction: now he suddenly understood.

"D—— it!" he exclaimed, starting up again. "I suppose I am a gentleman!" and he began to pace the floor. Scraps of argument came into his mind, and he answered them as he walked up and down.

"What is a gentleman, anyway? A figure of speech most people would say;—a bygone relic of aristocracy—a dead superstition; and for the sake of this—dream, what do I do? I ruin my career here and renounce fortune and success to keep faith with a set of scoundrels who would throw me over at the first chance. That is result No. 1 of my action. Result No. 2 is even better. I love a woman, madly, devotedly, as I never supposed I could love any one, and for what the world would call a fanciful scruple I give her up; I go away and leave her to a dog's life among people unfit to tie her shoe; I go away and allow Mr. Sherwood to ruin me, to separate me from her, to triumph over me, and all the time one word from me would put a stop to everything; and I do not speak that word because I am a gentleman! Faugh! I should be happier if I were a cad and a scoundrel—I should be happier because I had—her! What was it she said to me about her good name? 'The Jewel of her soul' she called it—and that she could not live without it; but then she did not know, she could not, for she did not have to pay my price! My price for my own self-respect! Was not that what I called it to her once, and has it anything to do with a gentleman? I wonder! But what comfort will it all be to me, without her?" again pacing up and down, "and yet I have got to do it; there is no other way out, that I can see."

"That is the queer part. My temptation is a most uncanonical one, it seems to me! The saints of old wanted the worst way to do right, and yet did wrong in spite of it. I want the worst way to do wrong,

and I cannot. I have to do right in spite of myself—and deserve no credit—just because I am a gentleman!” And he walked to the window and looked out.

The clouds had parted now and the sun was just beginning to appear, a faint watery sun somewhat chilled by the storm of the day before; but still with power in its rays to change the scene before him, still able to shed abroad its clear bright light, still able to transform the world for all poor mortals here below. And as Walter looked something of its brightness seemed to shine into his soul, making his sacrifice less, making his reward greater, making his loss disappear, and leaving only one thing unchanged—his love for Isabel. And he put on his things again and went out into the snow.

CHAPTER XXIII

"How sweetly sounds the voice of a good woman;
It is so seldom heard, that when it speaks
It ravishes all senses."

MASSINGER.

IT would be unfair to allow our interest in Walter and Isabel, the two great sufferers from the blizzard, to make us neglect the lesser sufferers from it.

Elizabeth felt that the distress it entailed upon her was very great; first as upsetting her domestic arrangements by the delay of certain edibles due to arrive by train that morning; second, by depriving her of Walter's company. It seems strange that this age, so profuse in sympathy for all suffering, deserved or no, should have omitted to bewail the fate of an unmarried woman deprived of the attentions from men that her soul craves but her charms do not invite. Poor Elizabeth was a pitiful example of this. It was not that she really loved or wished to marry Walter or any other man, but she did so much desire their attention, and she suffered so in seeing it squandered upon Isabel! In this case she chose to think it had not been, and that her father had forced the search upon an unwilling guest: such effect did a box of roses have! At intervals through the morning therefore, she watched for Walter; but Walter, as we have seen, was upstairs pacing the floor of his

room, or later ploughing his way up and down the length of the terrace, and did not appear until luncheon.

This preoccupation about his non-appearance did not render Elizabeth sympathetic either to her brother smoking moodily at the window, or to her sister hemming napkins by the library fire. They on their part were in no whit happier mood, as might be seen, in Margaret's case, by her choice of occupation. Why she should always hem napkins when out of sorts he would have found it difficult to say, for she detested hemming and did it very badly; but it was a habit that her husband knew and respected. Jack, on his part, had no such manner of showing his displeasure, so he was reduced to flicking the ashes of his cigarette on to the hard wood floor, which speedily attracted his sister's attention.

"Do be careful, Jack," she exclaimed. "You might take Mr. Coffin as an example. He always uses a receiver."

"This is not his house!"

"Neither is it yours!"

"It is my father's, and on that principle I have as much right to flick ashes as you to forbid me."

"For pity sake, keep still you two," here interposed Margaret. "The house does not belong to either of you, thank Heaven; otherwise it would be either ruined entirely, or not used at all for fear of injury. You might be far better employed taking care of Isabel, instead of quarrelling. I thought her looking very badly this morning."

"Not really!" answered Jack with compunction.

"She told me she felt perfectly well, but she seemed a bit cranky with me for not going out to look for her last night."

"And quite right, too," retorted Margaret. "If my husband had been as indifferent about me, I should feel cranky, too."

"I was not indifferent," began Jack indignantly.

"No, only hungry! Bye the bye, Elizabeth, what has become of Mr. Coffin? He certainly was not indifferent, if Jack was."

They both flushed angrily; but at this instant Mr. Sherwood's entrance with Henry Corning created a diversion.

"I think," said the former, "that by to-morrow there will be a train to New York. We have been down to the village, and I managed to get a wire through. We fared worse, it seems, than other parts of the country. The report from the south is encouraging."

"Cheer up, Jack, you will soon see your beloved New York again," said his brother-in-law, seating himself leisurely. "Personally, I am very well where I am, but the rest of you act as if your best friend lay unburied in the next town and you were not able to reach him."

"Do not be coarse, Henry," snapped his wife. "You know as well as I do that it is of the utmost importance that I get home for that meeting for 'Ameliorating the Condition of the Poor.' Arthur Hinsdale has written urging me to be there!"

"D—— Arthur Hinsdale!" muttered her brother.

"With pleasure in this case, Jack," said her hus-

band indulgently, "for I foresee that, thanks to him, we shall take a journey of four hours to-morrow instead of going in half the time the following day."

"I *must* get back," began Jack eagerly. "I am going with Coffin to look at some travelling outfits, and it is of the utmost importance that I do it at once."

"I should think, Jack, that you might at least have the decency to let Mr. Coffin finish his visit here first!" began Elizabeth.

"Oh! he is crazy to get back to town! Are you not, Coffin?" he inquired of Walter who entered at this moment.

"Strange, the effect of a blizzard," said Mr. Sherwood drily. "Given no trouble with the trains, and we should all have been happy to stay, should we not, my dear?" to the little débutante.

"Oh! indeed, Mr. Sherwood, I promised mamma to be back by New Year's," she answered rather alarmed.

"I must get home to-morrow if possible," said Jack's friend, leaving the window where he had been playing with Bennie and his dog. "I have a business engagement!"

"So has every one apparently. Elizabeth, my dear, I think in the meanwhile we will go in to luncheon;" which they did, and she made herself very pleasant to Walter Coffin, and enjoyed his undivided attention, such as it was, for Isabel was not present.

She had sent her apologies and promised to join them later. Her physical injuries, from the expos-

ure of the previous day, had really narrowed themselves to a slight cold and some pains in her limbs; but she was glad to make them an excuse for a little further solitude. She felt mentally weak and shaken and incapable of running the gauntlet of the assembled family; and also there was one person whom she did not wish to meet until her strength had returned.

So it was not until evening that Walter saw her. He had determined to have one more interview with her before he left, and he had accepted Jack's suggestion to go as soon as there was a train for them to take. The interview with Mr. Sherwood yet remained to him; but the one with Isabel occurred first.

Tea was over and the family had gone their usual ways before dinner time. Jack and his friend were in the billiard room and Mr. Sherwood in his study, while the others had apparently retired to dress. Walter had spent the afternoon with them in an attempt to clear a slide for coasting, and the fatigue, which he used as an excuse for leaving them, was quite genuine, and accepted as such even by Elizabeth. He entered the library, and throwing himself down in an easy chair by the window, he gave himself up to his own dreams as he gazed at the fast darkening whiteness of the snow without.

The room where he was showed up strangely by contrast; the firelight throwing flickering beams across the bronze ceiling, so that the Tudor roses there shone out like gold suns in a gilt firmament. It intensified the red brown of the oak panelling and

brought out the little scroll pattern on the leather hangings and the yellow brown of the chairs. Walter's eyes, attracted by the glow, caught its reflection along the line of volumes, in the one modest book-case which gave the room its name, and on the glass transparency over the window. It showed three girls in the costumes of the time of the Empress Eugenie, employed in skating, and it seemed to him that one of them bore a faint resemblance to Isabel.

There was the slight rustle of a skirt, the indrawing of a breath, and he looked up to see her coming towards him. She had, like himself, sought the room for a change and solitude, and found him there instead. As Walter rose quickly and bowed without speaking, she saw him for the first time and started slightly, but otherwise her face did not change. It was pale, and this paleness was accentuated by the white tea-gown which she wore, and which to Walter's eyes seemed to cling about her like a shroud as she stood by the window, the snowy landscape forming a background to her white form.

"I hope you are feeling better," he said, coming forward almost formally to take the hand she held out to him.

"Yes, and rested, too. I was a little cold and tired, that is all; but I am very strong. It would take a worse storm than that to hurt me."

He experienced he knew not what sinking of the heart at her manner, as she spoke in her old, light, offhand tone, and he made an attempt to answer her in the same way.

"I am glad to be able to see you to say good-bye

before I go. You know I am leaving to-morrow in case I can get a train."

This time her start was perceptible.

"You are going? I did not know it was to be so soon. Mr. Coffin, do not think I do not realise that I owe you my life!"

He made a gesture of deprecation.

"Oh! yes. If you had acted like the others and taken it for granted that I should reach home safely, it would probably have been my last ride!"

He said nothing, and she went on:

"I do not rate my life high; we must all die some day, and why not now as well as later? Still at times life is sweet even to me, and so I thank you!"

She gave him her hand, and he took it and held it but a moment as he answered almost coldly:

"I would cheerfully give ten years of my life to spare you a moment's pain, so you owe me nothing."

"What are you saying!" she exclaimed, moving away.

But Walter's impenetrable mask had dropped from him. His features, composed in conventional self restraint, twitched madly with passion; his voice had grown hoarse and tense.

"Oh! you think I am mad; but if so, it is for you. Listen to me one moment, Mrs. Sherwood—I am going away to-morrow. What can it matter to you what I say, and I must say it, I must!—I want you to know, no matter why. One day perhaps you will remember and be glad,—that there is one man in the world who loves you as you deserve to be loved, and not as those puppies do who are about you! I love you,

and it is against my will, for I never meant to let any woman get such a hold upon me. It is the one thing on earth that I promised myself to avoid, and I have gone contrary to every tradition of my life, but I do not care because it is for you."

He hurled these words at her, roughly, defiantly, more as if he were cursing than making love to her and she listened with a white face and parted lips and quickening breath, only saying as he paused a moment:

"Hush! You have no right to speak to me in that way!"

He smiled, while she watched him with the old expression that he knew so well; the furtive expression of—dread, as he went softly on—

"Why are you afraid of me? My love does you no harm! Oh! I know that I could make you love me; don't deny it, for you know it is true; and it is nothing against you, for compared to the people about you, I am a man, and you feel it, and your heart goes out to meet me; but don't be afraid; you value your good name, and so do I; it is as safe with me as though it was my own!"

It may be that this expression of his passion, coming as it did at a moment when she was weakened, as well by a physical as a mental struggle, destroyed her last remnant of self-control, for she burst into a peal of laughter that rang through the stillness of the room like a cry as she repeated after him, "My good name!" Then coming closer: "Why should I expect any one to value it, when my husband has done his utmost to drag it in the dust?"

As she spoke, facing him fiercely, with her arms behind her and her head thrown back, hissing the words at him through her set teeth, he answered her quietly and sadly:

"I have sometimes wondered if you knew!"

She seemed to divine his meaning even as he had divined hers, for she answered with a moan:

"If I knew! Then you do!"

"Yes, almost from the first."

She caught his hand in an icy grip.

"You know? Then others must!"

"No, no my poor child, do not be afraid! She told me herself; she told me, fearing I had discovered the truth, to prevent my warning Arthur against her."

"And no one knows but you and she?"

"No one, as far as I can tell!"

She breathed a sigh of relief and then suddenly sinking upon the sofa beside her, she leaned back her head and closed her eyes, as if her strength had for the time utterly failed her. Walter went over and laid his hand gently upon hers, and for a moment neither spoke; then she sat up, saying brokenly:

"I have known since that first night when Jack saw her! He told me—he would not have done so, but that I was there and he lost his nerve!—I would have left him then, but for the disgrace and because he begged and prayed me not to desert him, and I was afraid that if I did, he might sink lower—and after all he was Bennie's father and I could not expose him!" She paused and put her hand to her throat, as though struggling for breath; but after a

moment she went on: "I consented to continue under his roof and to bear his name—and I put him upon his honour—but my life has been a hell! I could never have found the courage to bear it, but for Bennie." And again she sank back upon the sofa. Walter bent over her.

"Isabel," he said, "Isabel, my darling, give up, this burden you have borne so long; it is beyond you! This man has forfeited all rights as your husband; let the world know him for what he is; leave him and come away and marry me. I love you, Isabel; it is impossible for you to know how much, for I hardly know myself. Let me think for you; let me decide for you; let me spare you; as I have from the first. I would never have told you; but as you know, give up this mockery of a life; this marriage which is no marriage; this position which satisfies you so little! Come away with me to my love and a better life!"

He sat down beside her, and drawing her into his arms, laid his face against hers and kissed her softly, as one caresses a child or a sick person, striving to soothe and calm her into a moment's peace and forgetfulness; but she suffered it only for a time. Then raising herself and pushing him gently away, though he still kept his arm about her, she whispered in a voice broken with sobs:

"No, no, it is not as you think, or as it used to be; that is over and done with! It is not my good name which stands between us; that counts as nothing now; God knows I love you too well for that; I love you so much that you have become a part of me, and anything which hurts you hurts me still more!"

He gave a cry of joy and tried to draw her to him; but again she pushed him away.

"But Bennie, why Bennie is much more than this—my child that I brought into the world and for whom I am responsible to God! Poor baby, he did not ask to be born, and it would perhaps have been better for him if he never had been!— And for me to hurt him; why, Walter, it is impossible; I would as soon take him up and dash his brains against the floor as do him this wrong! Oh! do you not see, can you not see, that I could not?"

He looked at her with a sudden sinking of the heart, and a fierce jealousy of this child she had placed above him shook him as he answered:

"How do you know that you would be doing him a wrong?"

"Could I avoid it if I made this story public, and disgraced his father in his eyes? You yourself would not be the one to tell me, and should I not do as much to spare him?"

He felt a spasm of rage at hearing his own words thus turned against him, and he went on bitterly arguing to convince himself as well as her.

"It is a morbid sacrifice which you are making for that child. His father is an unworthy man, who is false to you, and even religious scruples would not forbid your leaving him, and yet you refuse. What valid reason can you give?"

"The strongest on earth!" she said simply, "because it is a natural one, and if every one followed it there would be no need for any further law. A mother's love shows her that she cannot separate a

child from his father, except to avoid a greater wrong."

She caught his hands between her own and held them in a vise as she went on breathlessly:

"He is the best part of me, my religion; and if I wronged him, I could never hold up my head again! Oh! remember I told you there were some things I could never do, and this is one! This is one, and where would the world be, Walter, if it were not? How could it go on without a man's respect for his mother or her love for her child? They keep things straight where nothing else can, in a world which no longer fears law or religion, or a marriage vow. Oh! I feel it, I know it, even if I am not a good woman in Elizabeth's way; but I have gotten hold of the thing that counts and without it nothing good can exist!"

He dropped her hands with a groan which changed to a laugh as he began to pace the floor, and she stared at him mutely, crushed to the heart at this answer to her appeal; but Walter hardly noticed. He had walked to the window and was gazing out at the starlit twilight of the snow, stretching before him in all its radiant immensity—which the night was hardly able to veil. The great hemlock trees waved their ghostly branches, framed in icicles, toward the endless snow fields, leading to the river, and the river itself seemed a glazier reaching to the sky.

Into Walter's fevered brain there crept the image of a ghostly hand, sweeping over him and freezing him gradually into a semblance of the scene without. For at first his very blood had been on fire; the veins

were beating madly in his temples, his pulses throbbed, and little thrills coursed up and down his spine, as though from an electric shock. His whole body seemed rent and torn by a fierce animal passion, and then the next moment it had left him and in its place succeeded a dull physical apathy in which his mind worked with almost feverish force. What he felt was not resignation, but a species of blind rage as well against himself as Isabel for daring to oppose him; and yet strangely enough, this very opposition endeared her to him a thousand fold. She had never, since the time they first met, seemed so lovely to him, nor so desirable as at this moment, when he knew that he should be obliged to give her up. For he recognised now that he should be so obliged, and he felt the same dumb rage that had overwhelmed him earlier in the day at the time of his own struggle; as his sense of justice took the part of Isabel.

He turned under the influence of these feelings, and looked at her as though in farewell. She was sitting just as he had left her, with her hands clasped and her eyes fixed upon him—her neck and arms gleaming through the dull white of her gown—and there seemed to him something in that still white form, bathed as it was in a silvery reflection from the snow, that partook of its nature. Formerly she had appealed to him as the incarnation of ardent pulsating life, now she suddenly seemed to become something different and higher, as beautiful and unattainable as the ideal toward which he pressed blindly; but against which he had never ceased to struggle, as he now had against her.

And while these feelings swept over him, her eyes met his and she held out her hands to him and he returned to her, saying brokenly:

"I declare, it seems to be again a question of being a gentleman! Isabel, darling, do not look at me like that. You do not understand, but I do; oh! yes, I do, and you need not explain. There are things we can neither of us do, and whether the force that binds us is a blessing or a curse I cannot say; but it is there and we feel it; that is all!"

He took her face between his hands and looked at it long and lingeringly. Then he kissed her once on the lips—a kiss of farewell.

"Isabel," he said, "promise me one thing. The time may come, and shortly, when I shall have to go away and leave you. I cannot explain, but you will understand later. If your life changes and you need me, send for me and I will come; that is all! Do not doubt me. We have enough to bear as it is without misunderstanding each other. Promise me!"

"I promise."

"And whatever you hear, remember I have done nothing of which I have cause to be ashamed!"

"I believe you."

"And good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Another close embrace, another kiss and he was gone, and she sat there alone, looking out at the snow which stretched before her in its barren purity as cold, bleak, and comfortless as the life which was now to be hers.

CHAPTER XXIV

"After all, what is a lie? 'Tis but
The truth in masquerade."

BYRON—"Don Juan."

IN the meanwhile the members of the party left behind in New York were perhaps enjoying themselves more, though in a less fashionable way, than those who were spending Christmas in the country.

Mrs. Coffin and her sister were as happy as are all kind-hearted people, whose happiness lies in small things which they are able to procure. She had as keen a sense of pleasure, while arranging for the church Christmas tree, and the rector's Christmas present, as though she were taking part in the Queen's Jubilee. Indeed she felt the event to be of as much value to the world and fairly bubbled over with delighted self-importance, which Mrs. Crane echoed in a more subdued key. All this enjoyment was complicated by the exciting interest of having her portrait painted. Jeannie had finally agreed to the sittings being held at Mrs. Coffin's, instead of at the studio, for as the latter remarked:

"To a woman of my varied interests and many occupations, my child, it is impossible to undertake a thing of this kind unless it is made easy for me; and as to the light being wrong, why what does it really matter? Paint your picture first and then I will give

you a sitting at the studio to put in your atmosphere," and though Jeannie smiled, she finally acquiesced without any effort to explain.

So it came about, that she spent a good deal of her time at Mrs. Coffin's, working hard at the portrait, in order to have something with which to surprise Walter, on his return, as it was to be his Christmas gift.

Arthur took part very frequently in these sittings, trying their patience in his efforts to assist them both against their will. It was a delightful Christmas for Arthur, the best one he had ever known, and one which he was to look back upon for many a year to come. For a short time he put everything behind him, suspicion, jealousy, doubt and fear and lived only in the present and in his love.

Jeannie watching him as she painted, marvelled, almost touched, at the gentle expression of his face and the radiance of his smile, little dreaming that she looked upon them for the last time.

One afternoon, the day but one after the blizzard, he had gone over to Mrs. Coffin's, intending to make an effort to induce Jeannie to dine with him, when the sitting was over. The storm had not been nearly as severe in town as at Erneliff; but it was sufficient to upset the whole system of traffic, and to make the city as uncomfortable, as it always proves to be on such an occasion.

Just at dusk, and as Jeannie was putting the finishing touches to her work, preparatory to leaving, Mrs. Coffin was called to the telephone, and Arthur, fidgeting about for means of amusement, happened

to bethink himself of some family miniatures in the drawing-room, and taking them from the cabinet, in which they were displayed, he carried them to the window to examine.

This act is an apt illustration of the power of small things to control one's destiny, for had he not done so, or had not Mrs. Coffin's old-fashioned rep curtains been so heavy, as to preclude all possibility of noticing his presence there, events might not have occurred, which changed the lives of the two present, as well as the whole course of this history.

For while he stood at the window concealed from view during Mrs. Coffin's absence, and Jeannie sat painting, in apparent solitude, there was a ring at the door, a sound of voices in the hall, and then the portière was pushed aside and there entered—Jack Sherwood. Jeannie noticed nothing, intent on her painting, and Arthur was equally blind, until startled by an explanation, which reached him in Jack's voice; the one word "Jeannie"; but uttered in a tone which expressed at once fear, amazement and distress. She raised her eyes to meet his, and Arthur saw them, glazing to an expression of horror, as she exclaimed in a low but almost fierce voice:

"Jack, what are you doing here?"

The man addressed seemed to be overcome with some feeling—to Arthur watching him like a tiger, ready to spring, his face expressed unmistakably, both dread and terror—that he answered nothing for a moment and then in a low, strained tone: "Jeannie," he said, "why are you here? What do you mean to do?"

"What do I mean to do?" answered Jeannie in a menacing tone, with which Arthur would not have credited her soft voice. "I mean to have my revenge."

At this moment there was the light rustle of a skirt and Mrs. Coffin returned, looking interrogatively between the two, as Jack stammered: "Will you ask your son, Mrs. Coffin, to call for me to-morrow morning at ten?" and he was gone; while as the portière dropped behind him, Mrs. Coffin following the direction of Jeannie's eyes, saw Arthur standing by the window, with the expression on his face which neither of them ever forgot.

"Jeannie, what is Jack Sherwood to you?" he asked hoarsely, and Jeannie at bay, with newly awakened courage, answered him:

"Jack Sherwood was my husband!"

Arthur gave a cry, the cry almost of some wild animal, and springing towards the door would have dashed after him; but that Mrs. Coffin stepped between, and raising her slight figure to its full height exclaimed:

"Arthur, I forbid you to follow. You are sinking to his level, sit down; sit down, I say," fairly pushing him into a chair. "And now, Jeannie, tell us what this means."

As she uttered the last words, with a look and manner very like her son, Jeannie was beside her, with her arms about her and her face hidden on her shoulder sobbing: "Hear my story, dearest Mrs. Coffin, before you judge me. I can trust *you* to do me justice even if Arthur does not."

"You misjudge me cruelly, Jeannie," was all Arthur managed to say, and he glanced about him as if seeking means to escape. Jeannie lifted her head from Mrs. Coffin's shoulder and looked at him; her self control was beginning to return and with it some of her power of controlling others as she crept over to him and stroked his clenched hands, whispering:

"Poor Arthur," and then returning to Mrs. Coffin, she drew her down onto a chair, still holding her hand as she murmured:

"I will tell you my story, and I know you will understand, as Walter did."

"You told Walter and not me," gasped Arthur despairingly.

For a moment Jeannie's face paled with consternation; the next it became suffused with colour.

"Only because he discovered everything and taxed me with it," she faltered, "and we agreed it was our duty to spare you."

"And quite right, too," answered Walter's mother; "my son's judgment can be relied on."

"And I told him," sobbed Jeannie, "that I could not bear to risk the loss of two such friends."

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Coffin, while Arthur sat watching her dully, as she began in so low a voice that they had to strain their ears to hear:

"I was the girl whose story Walter told you, on that dreadful night in the studio; but he did not tell you who it was that caused my fault; who drove me to it; and then left me to bear the consequences alone."

Her voice rose until she ended almost in a shriek

while Arthur's hands clinched and unclined themselves; and Mrs. Coffin's face grew tense and her eyes sparkled with excitement. She felt almost as if she were assisting at the rehearsal of a French play, and Jeannie's manner assisted that impression, for in her desperate attempt to defend herself, to win them by every art she possessed, she unconsciously used her talents as an actress.

"I was a very young girl," she said breathlessly, "and I knew nothing of the world, nothing, nothing when I made that visit to the college town, where I first met Jack Sherwood—I had lived all my life at Cenecktady and cared for nothing but my painting and my dear father—He, Jack, was there with two friends—to see the football game; and when he was introduced to me I misunderstood his name and he did not correct me; but let me call him Mr. Herwood and introduce him so to others.—He said afterwards that he did not want me to know that he was the son of a millionaire; but to learn to value him for himself alone.—Then when I went home, he drove over to call on me, and my father took a dislike to him; but we did not know who he was at that time; though he often came up from New York to see me; and sent me flowers. At last he told me that he loved me and would give the world to marry me; but for a fatal obstacle that stood between us, and when I asked him if by that obstacle he meant his father, he did not deny it. He had told me before that his father was a very rich, proud man, and he begged me now to keep everything he said to me a profound secret on that account. My father in the meantime

had become much incensed at Jack's frequent visits and he forbade me to see him again; but of course I did not obey him; do you blame me, Mrs. Coffin?" and she turned her appealing eyes upon Walter's mother.

"No-o," with a vivid memory of certain clandestine meetings, "but still you ought to have obeyed your father, my child. Young people should always defer to the wisdom of their elders."

"And so I would if I had a mother like you who understood; but I had not, and I loved Jack so! I cannot tell you how I loved him; and he meant the world to me; the great big beautiful world of art, of which I knew nothing. Oh! how I loved him and feared to lose him! And at last he wrote and urged me to get my father's consent and some money to go abroad and study art, promising to join me in Paris and saying that if he were only away, he felt sure of being able to arrange everything with his father. I went to my father with this request, and would you believe it, he refused at once and accused me of scheming to get away so that I could see more of Jack Herwood; and that I must make up my mind to give him up at once and forever; while as to himself he was a ruined man and could afford to give me nothing. What would you have done, Mrs. Coffin, if any one had tried to come between you and the man to whom *you* were engaged?"

"Indeed I would not have endured it for one moment!"

Jeannie gave her a grateful glance and went on in the same quiet hard tone she had used from the first,

only that at times her metallic voice sharpened unbearably, and that she kept twisting and untwisting her hands. "And I did not. I told him at once I would never give Jack up, and he ordered me out of the room, and went to a meeting with his creditors; and I followed, and listened and heard him deliberately offer to make over all his property to them. Think of it, the money, which should have belonged to me, his only child, and was all I needed to make me happy with Jack, and he gave it up like that,—it was too much! So after my father went to bed, I wrote a letter, and told him that I could not obey his cruel command; that I had heard about the money and I knew, when he came to think it over, he had much rather it should go to his own child, who loved him, than to those horrid men who had ruined him; and I took ten of the bonds—ten, Mrs. Coffin, when I might have taken all, and no one the wiser—and left the letter on his desk. Can you blame me, Mrs. Coffin, my own father's money, and I his only child and I never thought any one but he would know?" As Jeannie asked this question her large eyes opened wide almost like those of a child and her voice lost its metallic tone.

"Of course, dear, it was not really quite right," Mrs Coffin answered unwillingly, "but I confess it was a natural thing to do; though your disobedience must have annoyed him."

"It killed him, Mrs. Coffin," Jeannie said calmly; but the nerves about her mouth began to twitch. "They found him lying on the floor by his desk, in an apoplectic fit and he died soon afterwards." Ar-

thur emitted an oath and even Mrs. Coffin looked sobered. "Think how bitterly hard that was for me, the innocent cause of all!" and for a moment Jeannie sobbed weakly. "Of course I did not know then," she went on with renewed self control, "for I took the night express for New York; sold the bonds the next day (I got the address of a broker at a bank where I was known), and then sent for Jack to meet me. I gave him the money; but I did not tell him any more about it then, for fear of worrying him, but asked him instead when we were to be married. He was terribly excited and begged for delay to prepare his father; but I refused! I told him," went on Jeannie fiercely, "that we had come to the parting of the ways and he must make up his mind then or give me up forever! He exclaimed: 'I cannot give you up!' and we were married that same day and sailed for Europe at once. We did not book together or under our married name, so they should not trace us; and it was lucky, for after we got to Paris, I learned all; my father's death, and the wicked manner in which his creditors had acted towards me. How they found out that the bonds were gone or I had taken them, I don't know; but they threatened to arrest me, making it impossible for me to go back, Jack said! And would you believe it, in spite of all I had done for him, *he blamed me for taking the money!* though it was for him; saying that now I had myself made it impossible to announce our marriage to his father, as he would never forgive the disgrace. This did not prevent his spending it so extravagantly, that in a few months, it was

nearly all gone, and his allowance from his father, too. He often left me to join his friends and relatives, so they might return a good report of him, he said; and I think it was then that he gambled and lost the money.

"We were in Paris and I had taken up my painting again, though Jack hated it; and I suggested at last, that he should confess everything to his father and beg him to forgive us, and that meanwhile I could help in our support. We had a terrible scene over it—that and other matters," went on Jeannie hastily, "and at last he left me, as I hoped to write the letter; but instead it was one to me bidding me farewell.

"He wrote that his father had sent for him to come home and that he must obey, as he had no more money left—and then he told me the awful truth—which it somehow seemed to me I had foreseen from the first—he told me that he had been married before and that his wife still lived!" Arthur here gave a cry of rage and started up as though to do some one an injury; but Mrs. Coffin caught his arm and drew him back again upon the seat, where he remained listening, with every now and then an inarticulate sound of rage or pain.

"She lived," went on Jeannie softly, her little white teeth showing for a moment in a smile more terrible than any cry would have been, "and she was waiting for him to come home, and she had everything that should have belonged by right to me, money, position, friends; everything," she hissed,

"except his love! That was mine, mine and always would be!" She paused and gasped for breath, while Arthur emitted a sound that resembled a snarl and Mrs. Coffin softly stroked Jeannie's hand.

"He said that he had not meant to deceive me," Jeannie went on at length, "but that he had been led on from time to time, from one thing to another, and that each time he had meant to tell me and had shrunk from the thought of my pain. And that at first he had meant to confess everything to his family and try to obtain a divorce from his wife and marry me; but that what I had done had made that impossible, as I could never come home if it were known, and that he was dependent on his father, who would never forgive such a disgrace."

Arthur sprang up at this point and paced the floor, as though beside himself, while Jeannie in her hard little voice went on as though rehearsing a part: "I was very ill for some time after this and then I roused myself, and my teacher, a Frenchman, who knew my story, helped me. He urged me to have courage and put my wretched husband out of my life, to devote myself to art. And to do this and set the past behind me, and make my return possible, I sent him a false notice of my death. Oh! it was legal enough, he saw to that; and then I became Jeannie Caxton and began a life of hard work; and it was then, Arthur," and she turned to him with outstretched hands, "that I met you—and from that time everything changed and I thought I had put the past behind forever;" she paused and Arthur's face softened.

"And one day," she continued, "I took up the *Paris Herald*, and I saw a notice of the birth of Jack Sherwood's child!"

"The brute!" exclaimed Mrs. Coffin.

But Jeannie's face had become distorted with rage. "That was the last straw," she cried. "I swore that some day I'd meet him—not under my true name to give him the satisfaction of having me arrested—but just to let him see me; his deserted wife; and the sword that hung over his head!—He did. I never shall forget his face; or that of the girl with him;" she paused and struggled for calmness, and in a moment she went on again quite in her former tone of rehearsing a part. "I am well avenged for I have shown him and the world what I am.—I have succeeded by my own efforts.—I have put my wrongs behind me and learned to seek consolation in art.—My only regret," and she turned towards him, "is for you, Arthur dear, my best friend whom I have been obliged to keep in ignorance. Forgive me for it and remember the fault was not mine but the fate which forced me to it. Tell me that you forgive me, as I know Mrs. Coffin forgives, for she can understand."

"Indeed I do," answered that lady, much excited, "and Arthur does, too, and would be a brute indeed were he to add by one word of his to everything that you have suffered."

Arthur as he listened to her story had sat a huddled mass, uttering at times, at certain points, a low groan, as of some animal in pain. At last, at this appeal, he roused himself, and crossing to where Jean-

nie stood gave her his hand saying, in a voice so changed she hardly recognised it:

“Jeannie, I forgive you. You are too innocent to appreciate what you did. I will try and think over what is to be done now, and in the meanwhile I must go. I want to be alone.”

He took her hand which she held out to him, and raised it to his lips and then turned and left her; while Jeannie bursting into tears, flung herself into Mrs. Coffin's arms.

CHAPTER XXV

"The hand of Douglas is his own."

SCOTT'S "Marmion."

TO explain Jack's presence at Mrs. Coffin's we must return for a short time to the snow-bound party at Erncliffe. Jack was not a person to submit long to any opposition of his wishes, even from the elements, and he had no sooner declared his intention of returning to town on the following day than, looking about for means to accomplish it, he be-thought himself of the automobile. It required much faith on Jack's part to suppose that a machine, which had so far shown no disposition to work smoothly under favourable conditions, would do so under unfavourable ones; but Jack possibly credited it, and justly, with a share of his own perversity.

So after a long consultation with Henry the chauffeur and Porter the coachman, he was able to announce at breakfast the next morning:

"I start for Croton in the automobile to take the train from there. Who will come along?"

"Certainly not I," answered Margaret. "I must get to town for the meeting to-morrow morning and the chances by train are slim enough, without trying the automobile."

"And you, Coffin?"

"I will stick to the train, thank you: I have rid-

den in the car, and I must say it strikes me as the more uncertain vehicle of the two."

"You are right, I think," said Mr. Sherwood. "The train may not get through, but the auto certainly will not."

"Then Isabel and I must go alone," answered Jack imperturbably. "You will see that we shall beat you into town."

"Is Isabel going on such a foolhardy trip?"

"She promised me last night to go."

"It is the very thing that would suit Isabel," said Elizabeth from the head of the table, as she poured Walter's coffee.

"Isabel is a good sport," remarked Margaret magnanimously; "but you are a fool, Jack, to take her," and that was the general verdict.

However, for once they were mistaken; for the car, which in pleasant weather over light roads, could be counted on to break down, behaved on this occasion with unexpected fortitude and forbearance, and carried them safely through to Croton; where they were able to get a local to town, and arrived long before the rest of the party.

Jack, leaving his wife at the house, rushed at once to his club, to meet the friend who was to accompany him on his hunting trip; and with newly inspired zeal, they both started forth to begin their preparations. Later, unable to obtain news of Walter, he had hurried to Mrs. Coffin's to inquire, and leave a message for him; and had met instead—Arthur Hinsdale, and thereby brought upon himself his own fate.

Walter in the meanwhile was going through a bad half hour, somewhat aggravated by his peculiar temperament. Had he been a better or a worse man he would have suffered less, according as an unselfish love for Isabel absorbed him to the exclusion of his own loss; or the sense of that loss determined him upon gratifying it, at any cost to her. He knew well enough that, whatever her opposition, she could not but, in her heart, desire an escape from her present life, and that escape one word from him might give, and that word he could not speak. He could not speak; but he was far from acquiescing in his own powerlessness to do so. It filled him with rage; not only against Jeannie, but against himself and his own scruples. And his very love for Isabel, while he was ready to sacrifice everything to it, by no means rendered him indifferent to the value of the sacrifice. He loved his career and it had formerly meant everything to him, while even now the loss of his promising prospects cut him to the quick. The fact that a word to Mr. Sherwood of the knowledge in his possession would transfer the power to him, and prevent the enmity which he was so anxious to avoid, filled him with a sickening sense of disgust.

And especially now, since Isabel's resolve effectually prevented any hope of winning her, his mind turned more and more to the career which for her sake he had been so ready to sacrifice. He had hardly realised the strength of this hope until he had lost it. Now, he suddenly felt that ever since that day, when he had first heard Jeannie's story, it had been there, in the back of his mind, waiting for a

word to call it forth. And now she herself had killed it, and he was left to bear the result of her decision, as well as of his own.

Poor Walter, he felt more and more, and to the very bottom of his heart, the disadvantage attendant upon being a gentleman; even while his own determination, to live up to it, hardened with every regret at the sacrifice entailed. And it was in this mood, evenly confounded of pride and disgust, resolve and vacillation, with a sickening sense of disappointment, that he turned to Mr. Sherwood on this morning of his departure, saying:

"May I speak to you a moment in your study?" and the latter, without answering, led the way there.

It seemed to Walter sitting in the small bare room with the cold, grave face before him, that he was confronting a grand inquisitor, and not a financier, intent only on obtaining information about a road. Though not by any means an imaginative person, or prone to transfer his own experience into romantic settings, he could not but feel as if he were himself on trial; and that the whole framework of his life were laid bare, to be relentlessly judged, by this impassive person before him; or as if he were submitting in his own person to that third degree about which so much has been written and said; and as if in this place and at this time, the conflict of his life was to be fought out.

He was mistaken; it had been decided the day before, when he sat alone in his own room, and looking out on the expanse of snow had resolved in a dull blundering way that, at any cost, he *must* be a gen-

tleman. Come what might, Walter would never be the same again, for he had chosen what to him stood for the best good, and his life must henceforth be shaped by it;—but he knew nothing of that now as he faced his host:

“I have thought over what you have said to me, Mr. Sherwood.”

“And I hope the result is satisfactory.”

“Hardly from your point of view, I am afraid, for I cannot do what you wish.”

Mr. Sherwood’s face did not change; but he only looked at Walter with cold, astonished eyes.

“You surprise me,” he answered at last.

“Not more than I do myself, Mr. Sherwood. I should be exceedingly glad to oblige you, not only because of your former kindness; but because, as you justly said, I am not indifferent to my own interest; but in this case it is impossible. Those people have employed me and trust me, and I cannot go back on them!”

“Not even if they do not deserve it and will not appreciate it?”

“Not even then.”

Mr. Sherwood’s cold grey eyes studied Walter’s face.

“I suppose, Mr. Coffin, you have counted the cost of your action?”

“I certainly have,” replied Walter grimly. “You can ruin me in New York, I know, and at best I spoil all chance of profitting by the interest you have so far shown in me; but it cannot be helped.”

Mr. Sherwood examined carefully the paper cutter he was balancing on his hand.

"I confess I do not quite understand you," he said at last.

"It is this way," Walter replied. "We have always been decent people in our family for generations; I do not mean that there were not black sheep among us; but at least they had gentlemanly vices. We have never been in trade, or cheated or broken our word, and I will not be the first to begin." Mr. Sherwood's lips twitched a little. "There are some things I cannot do, even if my mother is an American and I have inherited some of the American spirit of getting on. I cannot do it, Mr. Sherwood. I should like to, I am free to own; but I cannot."

Walter in his effort to make himself understood had not stopped to consider his words or their unconscious British insolence, and he realised this when too late. Mr. Sherwood did not reply immediately, and for a time they sat in silence. At last Walter, looking up, noticed that the cold grey eyes were again scanning him with their repellent inscrutable look, until at last their owner said:

"In that case you must take the consequences of your acts, which I regret," and for the second time he bowed Walter out. The momentous interview was over.

Walter had quite time enough to think over this conversation during his weary hours of waiting on the way to town. The temperature was the usual

one on Hudson River trains in winter, varying between 85° and 90°, and the delays were as long as the air was bad. Mrs. Corning talked incessantly; Henry Corning read; Jack's friend flirted with the little débutante, and Walter tried to think. He became so tired of this by the time they finally did reach New York, at half past seven o'clock, that he felt as though he had travelled the whole distance on foot; and taking a cab to his mother's, he determined to find solace in a good dinner and bed.

Unfortunately these intentions were frustrated, for on arriving there Walter saw at once that his desire for rest was vain. His mother's very face, as she met him in the hall, was so filled with excited distress and deprecating pleasure, that it was plain something very important had occurred.

She did not keep him long in doubt, as she began almost before his coat was removed.

"Walter, the most wonderful thing! Jeannie was married to Jack Sherwood, without knowing that he was married already, and Arthur, but for me, would have killed him."

Walter sat down, from sheer inability to stand, feeling as if his whole ordinary life was crumbling about him, like a house of cards.

"Oh! I know just how you feel!" went on his mother, well pleased. "It took me just in the same way, only more so because I was unprepared; but I was able to pull myself together," with some pardonable pride, "or I do not know what would have become of poor Jeannie, or Arthur either."

"Tell me how it happened," gasped Walter, weaned from any further desire for rest. Mrs. Coffin went through the whole story with what cannot be otherwise described than rapturous excitement, ending with:

"And after I had at last quieted Arthur I was obliged to devote my whole attention to poor Jeannie, who was in a most pitiful condition of grief and distress."

"Poor Jeannie brought the whole thing on herself!" said Walter brutally, "by acting in a way that would be criminal if it were not so foolish, and she must take the consequences."

"Walter, it was such a natural mistake; her own father's money!"

"We will not go into that now, Mother. I cannot seem to make you understand, that even for a woman, there are certain laws of honesty."

"It takes one woman to understand another," said Mrs. Coffin tranquilly, "and I understand just how poor Jeannie feels. I believe she still loves that wretch and that her greatest grief was when he returned to his wife."

"Then why in the name of all that is reasonable did she make him think she was dead?"

"Just because she still cared for him and wished to burn her bridges behind her and put him out of her life forever," said Mrs. Coffin with mixed metaphor and rapt expression. "Oh! I understand her so well!"

"I am very glad that you do, for I think you are

the only sane person who does. Why, if she wanted to put him out of her life forever, did she come back here and flaunt herself before him?"

"She says from revenge; but I think because she still cared."

"Then if she cared, why not acknowledge the whole story and be done with it?"

"Oh! she could never do that; her pride would prevent; even if she did not risk imprisonment."

"I always thought the latter contingency improbable, the result of Jack's suggestion and her own fears. But at any rate, the least she could do was to let Arthur know the truth. She has turned the poor fellow's head; and will neither marry him herself or give him up."

"Walter, he was her only friend."

"Nonsense; he was not her friend at all and she knew it."

"Of course I cannot expect you to understand, Walter, for you are not a woman."

"No, thank Heaven! And Arthur, where is he? I must go in search of him."

"Walter, I hope you will do nothing of the kind, till you have had your dinner. You look worn out," she added with some compunction, "and Arthur especially said he wished to be alone."

"That may all be; but he is in no fit state—"

"He looked it less than you," said his mother with some discernment, and Walter was at last prevailed on to go in to dinner. He felt so weak and shaken by the events which had crowded upon him that he was not now able to collect his thoughts or to reason

upon the effect on his own affairs. Only one fear oppressed him, the thought of what Arthur might do; and exhausted as he was, he determined to go at once in search of him.


Mrs. Coffin, seeing opposition was in vain, was obliged to yield, and was repaid by her son's return in a short time with the, to him, welcome news of Arthur's absence. He had left town that evening for Cenecktady, saying that if any one called for him he would be away some time.

"There, you see," said Mrs. Coffin, "he knows what his temper is and is determined to keep out of harm's way. I am very glad; and for you, Walter, go to bed; you look done up!"

"Cenecktady," mused her son; "now what the devil is he going to do there? Mother, I want you to give me your sacred word of honour, not to mention this to any one. If it was another woman I would not trust to it; but I know, you can keep a secret when you please."

"That is just what your poor father used to say, Walter, that I was the most secretively frank person he knew. I promise and you can rely on it. Good-night, my son."

"Good-night, Mother," and they parted.



CHAPTER XXVI

"That deep torture may be called a hell
Where more is felt than one has power to tell."
SHAKESPEARE—"Rape of Lucrece."

ISABEL had a somewhat similar homecoming. She was in her room, resting from the fatigue of her journey and the still greater fatigue of the experience through which she had passed. She had been absent only a week, and yet in that time it seemed to her that everything had changed in appearance and become as dull and colourless as she felt herself to be. The snow lay in the street, in a heavy, inert mass, beaten by the passing vehicles into a grey pulp, which neither melted nor froze; but seemed to exude instead into the heavy air. There was no sun; but the light had acquired from the snow a certain glaring quality, which gave an unbecoming hue to everything within the room. The bright chintz of Isabel's curtains looked garish, and the white paint of her woodwork had acquired a metallic tone; while Isabel herself, as she cowered over the fireplace, could see her own reflection, staring out at her spectre-like from between the gilt flowers of her glass. It startled her at first by the helpless dreariness of the expression, and she covered her face with her hand to shut it out—but the next moment she had completely forgotten about it, absorbed as she was in other and far bitterer thoughts.

At the moment these thoughts were not of Walter; but of her husband, while she went over in her mind all the dreary details of her married life. She had again the sensation of her gradual awakening to one failing after another in the man she had married; accepting them first as weaknesses, then as faults, and at last as inevitable realities. She pitied herself as she did so,—she who had felt herself so far above self pity,—because her life had come to mean to her nothing but failure. And for it she could have wished to blame herself, if by so doing she might only have lifted the blame from him—but she could not, and that strangely enough was the hardest blow of all! She had so wanted to believe in him; so hoped to reclaim him; so wished to make her sacrifice count! And yet through it all, she had no moment of weakening, no self regrets, as she looked back upon the past; for she felt as never before the inevitableness of her conduct. As she had said to Walter, there were things that she could never do, and she realised this now more than ever; not with rebellious rage—as he had done—but with a sensation of awe. Her faith was a part of her; it was herself; it belonged to her; it was her own good name—and she knew now how martyrs are made.

“And they think me so modern!” she murmured with a smile of bitter humour.

There was a hurried step outside and Jack entered. His face frightened her, for it was the old look she knew so well and had seen so often at the time of Jeannie’s first appearance; she had once watched a dog hunted down by a group of small per-

secutors, and it seemed to her that his face had worn the same expression.

"Isabel," he said, "you must persuade my father to let me go away. I am not well and this life here is ruining me body and soul. I must get off to a freer atmosphere and an out of door life. I cannot stand it here any longer."

She caught her breath quickly. "What has happened, Jack?"

"Nothing, nothing at all, except that I am crazy to get away."

"From Bennie and me?" she asked more sadly than reproachfully.

"Yes, from both of you," he answered, and accustomed as she was to his fits of restless depression, there was something in his tone which roused in her a sense of fear, as he went breathlessly on, moistening his dry lips and working his nervous hands: "You are my wife only in name, and the boy has your way of looking at me. Let me go, Isabel."

"Heaven knows I am not trying to keep you, Jack," she said, still under the influence of this vague fear. "I have done my best for you and I have failed."

He caught hold of her arm with a futile childish rage, crying:

"You are a good sort, Isabel; but I cannot live up to you. Let me go," and as there flashed across her mind a conviction of the truth of his words, a rush of pity, as of self-distrust, assailed her. "Indeed, Jack," she said gently, "I have tried not to be too hard on you!"

He took several turns up and down the room, as though in an effort to calm himself before answering. "I know," he said at last, his young haggard features still twitching nervously, "you have tried and I have tried too; I tell you, Isabel, I have, though I know you won't believe me. I wanted to be a decent fellow; the sort you like and all that; but it isn't in me. I go on a bit, and then down I go again! and each time it's a little lower and what is the use?"

She laid her hand on his arm; "Jack!" she cried, "think of your father!"

"Oh! he will not mind after a while," he answered hopelessly; "he has Bennie!"

"Bennie," she said, "is your son, not his."

"But he is yours too," Jack pleaded eagerly, "and you can bring him up to take my place and make it up to him; you will, won't you, Isabel?" and she noted with surprise that at the mention of his father's name his face had softened; but before she could avail herself of this discovery, it had hardened again and he added almost with a sneer: "You have such a lot of family feeling, you know!"

"If I had not," Isabel exclaimed with sudden passion, "do you suppose I would be here; at your side; trying to help you; trying to rouse you to a sense of what is due to it!"

"So that is why you stuck to me," her husband said coldly. "I always wondered! No," as she turned away in despair at his failure to understand. "I did not mean that!"

"I stuck to you, if you must know," she answered with her first flash of anger, "at first for my own

sake as well as yours; later—for the sake of family feeling if you like to call it so: so that your son, our son, might have a home; a father; a family; the things which every child has an inalienable right to have, and can have if his parents know their duty.”

“Then let my father take my place with Bennie,” he broke in, ignoring her violence. “As for me, I am tired of it all; I must get away,” and he began to pace the floor again, his hands twisted nervously together behind his back and his features working convulsively. Again Isabel was struck by a suspicion and again she made an effort to understand.

“Have you—seen any one, Jack, who has frightened you?” she asked in a tense voice; but he shook his head, in dumb and angry denial; the while he still continued his rapid pacing to and fro. His self control was beginning to return and with it all his former secretiveness, which seemed to make it impossible that he should confess what had taken place. At another time she might have made a further effort to discover it, but just now she felt unequal to anything more. A sudden feeling of exhaustion had seized upon her and left her too weak for exertion. She felt like a strong swimmer who, in trying to save a drowning man, is caught by him about the neck, strangled, borne down, till ready at last to sink, with him, under the deep, dark water.

She was roused by Jack’s voice and looked up to see him standing at her side with his hands in his pockets; outwardly calm, but for a slight twitching of his lips.

“I am a bad lot, Isabel,” he said in his usual even

drawl, "but I cannot help it; my nerves have gone back on me to-night; that is why I need a change. You can see by looking at me that I do," and he turned his face to the light, at the same time avoiding her eye. "Get my father to let me go away now, and when I come back things will be different—I promise you, Isabel, that they will!" and he caught hold of her hand in an icy grip.

"Very well, Jack," she answered, "I will see what I can do," and as he stooped and kissed her, it seemed to her as if it were at once a plea for forgiveness and a farewell. At this moment her life with him suddenly rose and stared her in the face like some skeleton at a feast, grinning at her through its fleshless lips. She felt the secret horror and irony of it; the terrible restless shrinking from an elusive but ever present danger; the haunting nightmare of her hours of gaiety; the dull corrosive intuition of a trouble always present and yet never acknowledged, as of a hair shirt worn beneath a brocaded robe.

She sat there long into the night tearless, shaking with dread of she knew not what coming evil; praying only for one thing, release from the awful shadow which had so long darkened her life.

CHAPTER XXVII

"To be honest as this world goes is to be one man picked out of ten thousand."

SHAKESPEARE—"Othello."

MR. SHERWOOD offered no opposition to his son's urgent request to be permitted to start at once on his journey. He was shocked at Jack's appearance and filled with dread lest the delicate health inherited from his mother should culminate in a premature decline. Jack also found an unexpected ally in Walter Coffin, who urged strongly that London was in every way a more satisfactory place in which to purchase the necessary outfit. So that in a few days all the arrangements had been made; the passage taken; and every one concerned in the matter began to feel a sense of relief that all fear of danger had passed.

In the meanwhile Walter had handed in his report to the committee, and one day soon afterwards he was summoned to an interview with its chairman.

"I am glad I was able to give you so satisfactory an account of conditions on the road," he said, rather puzzled at the manner of the man facing him; a florid, pleasant gentleman in every way the antipodes of Charles Sherwood. The other smiled perfunctorily, wrinkling his forehead into a perplexed frown.

"Oh! Ah! Too satisfactory altogether, I am afraid. The fact is, my dear Coffin, I have gone over

this report with the committee and we think it paints matters down there altogether too much *couleur de rose*. Now here, and here," he specified, looking over the report, while his smile faded into a series of wrinkles about his mouth and eyes, "there are points stated in such a way as to mislead the uninitiated. It would never do to read this at the meeting; it would give the bond-holders an exaggerated idea of the value of their property, and they might say: 'Why the Devil have we had no interest?'"

Walter felt his anger beginning to rise.

"I beg your pardon," he said haughtily, "you did not tell me you wished a garbled report."

The man facing him flushed a little and shrugged his shoulders airily, while the little wrinkles about his mouth deepened still further into unbecoming lines.

"Nor do we. You quite misunderstood my meaning; we only want a few changes made here and there, which will somewhat alter the general tenor of it; that is all."

Walter's disposition had suffered under the succession of shocks he had lately experienced, and instead of veiling his refusal in polite paraphrases, he answered bluntly and explosively:

"My report gives a correct account of conditions on the road, and it will therefore be impossible for me to alter it."

"You mean you refuse to do what we ask?" his companion said, still with his pleasant perfunctory smile.

"If you choose to put it so—yes."

The other's manner stiffened behind his smile.

"Very well, my dear fellow, then I am afraid you will have to whistle for your money. The financial condition of this road is not as good as its rolling stock."

"We will see about that," Walter replied; but he knew that practically he was worsted, and he was enraged at his own share in bringing about the fact. Mr. Sherwood had been right; his employers had not appreciated his good faith, and he felt a sense of profound discouragement, though hardly of surprise; successive blows have this advantage, that they numb the sensibilities of the sufferers.

"I must get away from here," he said to himself; but he realised with a fierce pang that the distress this decision caused him was due to the loss, not of his opportunity; but of Isabel. It seemed to aggravate his sense of injury that he was powerless to conquer the passion which he was determined not to gratify, while he was denied the one thing which might have taken its place and helped him to forget. For Isabel's sake, he derived a kind of dreary satisfaction in sacrificing himself, and the unwilling respect which she excited in him added to this feeling; but it was far otherwise in regard to his career, which concerned only himself.

"It is all my cursed conscientiousness," he said to himself as he paced the floor. "There is no demand for honesty nowadays; it is at a discount; it is not modern; it will always stand in my light."

The thick dusk of a rainy winter's twilight was closing in on Mrs. Coffin's drawing-room, as he came

to this conclusion, and each familiar object glowered at him through the gloom; while outside the rain hissed against the window pane, or dropped onto the slushy sidewalk with a soft slopping sound.

Walter strode up and down with the free, swinging gait habitual to him; a gait at once vigorous and natural; for the slight stiffness that characterised him extended only to his manner; his movements had all the freedom from self-consciousness, which only good breeding and an open air life can give. He loomed up in the fussy, overcrowded room like an antique bronze in a French salon; dominating by its incongruity, and he seemed to be himself conscious of this, as he charged between small tables or brushed aside chairs, with a perfect disregard of everything except his own desire for rapid motion.

"I am learning how injustice can cut," he thought with bitter irony, as he remembered his conversation with Arthur Hinsdale. "I am learning how to eat my own words," and he made a very wry face. It was not in Walter's nature to accept defeat meekly, nevertheless a faintly humorous perception began to dawn in his brain to mitigate the force of his despondency.

"I ought to take my licking like a man," he decided with a spiteful sweep of his arm, which sent a small chair flying, "and it is no worse for me than for others; so I need not consider myself a martyr!" and he stooped to pick up the remains of the chair. "For after all," he concluded, "as I believe I mentioned to Arthur, there always has been injustice and it is safe to conclude there always will be;" and

Walter threw aside the remains of the chair and resumed his pacing of the floor.

Suddenly there came to him a thought, which made him pause and softened his face oddly, as though with a memory of Isabel.

"What of the others?"

Yes, what of those other victims? That long bread line, waiting at the bar of human justice? Those weaker ones that Arthur Hinsdale championed, defrauded, downtrodden, deceived, with no help, but in Heaven, and in souls like his? Walter at the thought of them experienced a pang of sympathy, a softening of the heart, as of one who understands. He recalled the countless multitude who had suffered, not for their own sins; but for those of others; victims of an immutable law, which they themselves had not broken,—and he remembered Isabel. They surged up out of the past; a swarming endless throng; great souls, their wise plans ruined by envy; pure hearts smothered under a weight of misconception; weak wills unable to withstand oppression. All unlike, except in one thing; the right to bear injustice!—and for the first time in his life, Walter pitied them.

"I must get away from here!" he said again, but he said it now without bitterness and with a dull pain, as different from his former despair, as health is from disease. He wondered at himself for accepting Arthur's absence in the same way, with a mixed feeling of dread and relief; but for that as for all else, he felt only indifference.

Arthur had been gone nearly two weeks, and he

himself had already begun a search for employment; but so far without success; when one day to his surprise he received a letter from Mr. Sherwood.

"Dear Mr. Coffin:

"Will you call to-morrow at ten; at my office.

"Yours truly,

"CHARLES SHERWOOD."

Walter obeyed the laconic request with something more like interest than he had felt since the trip to Erncliff. Mr. Sherwood's office down town was on a more ornate scale than the one in the country, where he had perhaps indulged his own taste for simplicity. Here on the contrary his surroundings had a massive dignity which better befitted his own personality; and yet here, as in the country, it was that personality which most obtruded itself upon the mind of his visitor. Walter, fresh from that other interview, and with the memory of it still upon him, was struck by a sense of the overwhelming superiority of the man before him; which added to the poignant regret he had always felt at being unable to work with him. Mr. Sherwood received him as usual with cold civility and looking him over just as before, remarked:

"So they have turned you down."

"Apparently," replied Walter, trying to smile and wondering at the source of this information.

In the eyes watching him there appeared a gleam of amusement.

"You remember perhaps that I predicted it."

"Yes."

"And you are no longer in their employ?"

"No."

Mr. Sherwood sat for a while twisting the fob of his watch; his eyes following the pattern of the rug at Walter's feet. At length, straightening himself, he said:

"Then suppose you try mine for a while."

"Yours," gasped Walter, almost annihilated.

"Yes, I have at last succeeded in getting possession of that road—never mind how—rather in spite of you; and thanks likewise to you, I paid more for it than I should;" he paused and looked at Walter with a slight lift of his eyebrows; "but let bygones be bygones," he continued blandly. "I want an engineer to take charge of the improvements I am planning to make there and I think you would be a good man for the job; unless you have conscientious scruples," he concluded with a smile.

Walter stared, unable to echo it or even to believe what he heard.

"I do not understand," he said at last. "You do not strike me like a person who changes and you told me my refusal would ruin me."

Mr. Sherwood returned his look with the same inscrutable expression in his eyes, though his lips still smiled.

"I said it might," he answered, "but you see it has not. You judge rightly, Mr. Coffin, in believing me to be a person who does not lightly change; but neither do I ever indulge in useless spite, for I have always found it did not pay. It is about this way: there are just two kinds of men and two only, who can be of use to me in my business; the subservient

man, and the honest one. I thought you belonged to the former class, and now I find you belong to the latter. Therefore I have a different kind of work for you to do; that is all."

For a moment Walter did not reply, but remained as he was, his eyes under their lowered brows, gazing intently off into space above Mr. Sherwood's head. He was never quite able to formulate the thoughts that came to him then; but a faint reflection of them remained with him always and coloured something of his future life. A feeling, almost a conviction, that in the practical world in which he lived, there still remained a place for honest men to do honest work; a feeling almost a conviction that he was such a man. Then his mind was recalled to the present by hearing Mr. Sherwood say: "I hope you are satisfied."

"I am, and greatly obliged," replied Walter.

"Very well, then report to me here at this time to-morrow," and for the third time Walter bowed himself out; but with what different feelings can be imagined. He was under no illusions. He knew that Mr. Sherwood was making use of him now, as he would have made use of him before—had he succeeded in corrupting him—to further his own ends, and these ends, once accomplished, would discard him in the same manner; and yet he felt, as from the first, a strong attraction towards this man who had treated him thus kindly and mercilessly. In spite of everything, it seemed to him as if there would always be a bond of mutual liking and fellowship between them, and that it possibly arose because they respected each other.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"Fate send some creature in the way
Of my love for her,—
So I prove myself that sea
Of passion that I needs must be."

ROBERT BROWNING—"Time's Revenges."

IN the meantime Arthur, fleeing madly from the scene of his suffering, had filled the mind of his friends, at first with apprehension and then with concern; but never with any real respect for his powers of action in the matter. It is a common mistake to assume that highly sensitive, excitable people are incapable of acting both promptly and efficiently when the occasion calls for it. On the contrary the very extremity of their suffering sometimes hurries them forward, by making them resort to it, as a substitute for the burden of their grief. Arthur's mind, working with lightning rapidity, had shown him at the same time what to do, and the means of doing it, by recalling to him, Jeannie's friend Mr. Fosdick at Cenecktady; whom he at once decided to go in search of.

Since then he had hardly eaten or slept; he had been constantly at work; was white and exhausted with grief and anxiety; but he returned triumphant, for had he not freed her from the dark cloud which had so long overwhelmed her? Of Jack Sherwood

he simply had not thought; the reckoning with him would come later.

The morning of his return saw Jeannie seated at her painting in the studio and showed a marked change since his first meeting with her. Some faint lines had appeared about her eyes, and marred the delicate contour of her cheek, and her mouth had taken on a hard, bitter curve foreign to it. She painted rapidly, with a kind of forced calmness; but the hand with which she held her palette was unsteady, and every now and then she would rise and take a restless turn about her room, returning to gaze with lack-lustre eyes upon her work. It was a picture intended for an over mantel and represented two cupids at play, with a beautiful shepherdess garlanded with flowers, and there were moments when she wanted to daub the painted smile off the face of the beflowered lady.

Jeannie's excessive nervousness had increased so upon her, that she could not longer count upon herself; and indeed there had been times since the scene in Mrs. Coffin's drawing-room, when she had felt afraid of her own mood. That was only at times; at others she had revelled fiercely in it, giving her mind free play; letting it range at large over her past life; recalling scenes that had better have been forgotten; rousing passions that she had deemed long dead.

To-day as she wandered up and down the studio, or sat before her easel staring off into space; her foot beating restlessly from time to time on the floor, it became more and more impossible for her to deceive

herself. This was no new experience; she had felt that way several times before; and was able carefully to note every sign. For her it had almost the same horrible fascination which a doctor feels for his own symptoms, when watching for the approach of a dreaded malady; except that to Jeannie her own liberty and pleasure were a thousand times more precious than life! She had said to herself that she had earned them, and she shook her little fist threateningly in the air as though apostrophising fate—but this mood did not last very long! The very rage that had caused it, brought to her other thoughts, and tears slowly gathered in her eyes and forced themselves unnoticed down her cheeks. And yet even while she wept for her lost happiness; even while the memory of Arthur gave her a faint thrill, the memory of another love surged over her, and roused other thoughts, other schemes; other plans of vengeance.

And Arthur entering, softly and unannounced, noticed the change in her; and his animosity against Jack Sherwood, which he had sternly held in abeyance, broke out afresh and shook him, as the fierce wind of the blizzard had shaken the leafless trees; but it was only for a moment; the next he had stepped forward and uttered her name.

She sprang up.

"Arthur, you are back; I am so very glad. It is a sign that you have forgiven me."

"It is a sign that I have been working for you, Jeannie," he answered. "Here are papers releasing you from all further anxiety. They are signed by

every one of your father's creditors or their heirs, and free you from any claim against you; and they have also pledged themselves not to prosecute you for what has taken place."

"But I do not understand," she exclaimed, almost dazed; "how were you able to bring this about?"

"Mr. Fosdick and I managed to buy them off," he answered evasively; but he did not tell her at what a cost of time and money this had been brought about. Jeannie's gratitude remained as ever vague and beyond pecuniary considerations.

"Arthur!" She sprang up and flung her arms about him. "Arthur, how like you; how noble; how great! Arthur, I can never thank you enough."

"Hush, Jeannie!" he said, drawing away from her, "you owe me nothing, for you do not love me—you never did."

She made a mute deprecating gesture and strove to take his hand; but he went on almost harshly:

"I am not blaming you; I always knew it in my heart of hearts; but I thought I could make you some day—and now—" A pause and he came nearer to her. "I only want to make you happy," he continued, "and to avenge you," he hissed in her ear.

There was a silence, in which they almost seemed to hear the beating of their hearts, then the hoarse roar of an electric train broke on their ears, and as it ceased Jeannie's voice whispered softly:

"To avenge me, Arthur!"

"Yes, against him, Jack Sherwood!"

"You will not kill him!" she shrieked.

Arthur caught hold of her arm and held it as in

a vise. "Jeannie," he said fiercely, "you do not love him?"

"No, no," she moaned, "I hate him."

"Then say the word and he shall pay in tears of blood for every one he has made you shed."

They stood facing each other, as he held her at arm's length, his eyes burning her like coals of fire, and she seemed to be fighting a fierce constraining force, compelling her, against her will, to do its bidding. Then suddenly into her own eyes there leaped an answering flash and she said softly:

"Do not kill him; let the world know him for what he is!"

Another electric train clashed by and an automobile horn, of a peculiarly aggressive type, emitted a harsh, melancholy wail. Arthur stood as though turned to stone, his fingers mechanically gripping her arm which he held, and when at last he dropped it and turned away with a groan, she stood staring mutely down at the imprint which his fingers had left upon her flesh.

There was a breathless pause. Arthur paced the floor a couple of times and Jeannie stood where he had left her. At last returning he said in a matter of fact tone:

"Where were you married?"

"In St. Peter's church," she whispered.

"That is all that I need to know; have courage, Jeannie. You will be avenged!" and he turned on his heel and left her without another word. But an hour afterwards saw him emerging from St. Peter's with a folded paper in his hand. His rage was

gathering now with every step he took; he had known it was there underneath all the time; but he had not dared to give it a free reign. Now he brought it out and gloated over it. His little Jeannie, led astray, injured, destroyed by this man; the decadent son of a millionaire; the millionaire who stood in his mind for all the worst faults of his class.

He remembered Charles Sherwood, as he had looked on his first visit to him, when he had called his attention to the condition of his tenements; those tenements which were still out of repair. He remembered him a little later at Erncliff, and how for a moment his cold eye had brightened as he looked at his son; that son who had broken Arthur's heart, as he had ruined Jeannie's life.

Yes, they should both suffer and bitterly for the injustice they had done; and he ground his teeth together with rage. He was utterly exhausted by this time; both by his interview with Jeannie and his exertions in her behalf and had hardly strength to drag himself home—under the shadow of the tall building which had so darkened its light and his life.

He crept up the stairs unnoticed and let himself in to his room. It was all so dark and cheerless here; just as he had left it, when he went away two weeks before. He lit the light and shaking with cold, went to the fireplace and tried to start a fire on the hearth. He succeeded, after a few fruitless attempts, and going to the cupboard he managed to discover a couple of mouldy biscuits left there since the tea he had given for Jeannie. These he seasoned

with some whiskey from his travelling flask and felt revived.

He said to himself that he had work to do and needed strength to do it, and it seemed that his frail body responded to the call, for after a little rest, his strength returned to him and he sat down to his desk to write.

But at first the words would not come, while other pictures did unbidden; pictures of his life here; of his lonely struggles, first for existence, and then for recognition; the disappointments and disillusionments of his literary career; and the fight that he had waged from the first; the fight against injustice which had been the keynote of his life. Justice, it had always eluded him, though he valued it above everything, and would it do so now in this crowning moment of his struggle? How he had loved it; how he had fought for it always; and never more than now! Oh! never. And then he thought of Jeannie, in those first days of their acquaintance in Paris; of her sweetness and gentleness, and the undercurrent of sadness—which had touched him in her—underlying it all. How he had believed in her and loved her, crediting her with all the gentler virtues, which were the attributes of the ideal women of his dreams; and which to him were still latent in her, defaced, marred, by the touch of the man, who had ruined, not alone her body, but her mind. Arthur, when all was said, was as much an idealist, as though he had lived four hundred years ago; and though his body moved and took part in all the scenes about him, his mind led a life of its own above and beyond it, where

men were true and women were good, and a help to each other in all noble thoughts. It was thus that he had loved Jeannie, and this Jeannie of his dreams was no longer there, destroyed, defaced forever; and the man who had done this, must not, should not, go unpunished! He must stand out to the world as an example—a warning, to all who had the will, and might have the opportunity, to imitate him!

And at this point, suddenly, words seemed to come to Arthur, words which were at once a plea, an arraignment and an appeal for justice against a criminal and that criminal the representative of his class; a representative for all time of what was base and low and unhealthy in the civilisation which he represented.

As he sat there writing, the dawn broke, and the room gradually lightened about him, until faint cold gleams of what was once sunlight stole over the top of the tall building opposite and touched Arthur's face, showing him that the morning had come and that his work was finished and ready to give to the world.

CHAPTER XXIX

"I saw the Iron enter into his soul."

STERNE—"Sentimental Journey."

IT was the morning of the day Jack Sherwood was to sail, a welcome day to him, and as it approached some of his foreboding left him, and he was able to put aside his fears and prepare for it with anticipations of pleasure. With Jack, even his troubles sat lightly upon him, and though, as we have seen, he could suffer, yet the suffering itself was like his love, differing from it only in being recurrent and cumulative. But now he was again cheerful and had imposed his mood upon his family and even upon Walter, watching anxiously his cousin's return, even upon Isabel, disturbed by she knew not what premonition of coming disaster.

The ship was to sail about noon, and all the Sherwood family had accompanied Jack and his friend to see them off. Walter had made his farewell at the house, and later had gone to Mr. Sherwood's office on some business connected with the new road. He promised himself after leaving there in the afternoon to stop at Arthur's and see if any news had been received from him; though had he known where his cousin was at that moment he would hardly have lingered so quietly over his work.

On the top floor of one of the tall buildings Arthur so hated was the office of the editor of the *Evening*

Mercury, a paper much patronised by him, owing to his friendship with its chief. It overlooked the city and from below it appeared to overlook the sky; but it was the streets not the sky that he saw from above. All the hurrying crowds of people who swarmed through them were magnified to him by the distance into the sinister shadows of a nightmare, until he felt as though assisting at a procession of ghosts. It seemed to him as if nothing in the world counted but that restless, hurrying throng, who were gradually pulling him down, down to their level; the dead level of their busy, vacant lives. They affected him with a kind of terror and loathing, the dread that he had so often felt for the sea, when in a stormy mood, a dread dim and undefined; a sense of horror of the dull level of mediocrity displayed there; of its contagion and power; of its antagonism to himself and all that he believed in or held dear. A revulsion of feeling had taken place in Arthur towards those people, whom he had once loved; but who now inspired him with aversion, as if they were themselves the instruments and not the victims of the injustice which he abhorred. And under the influence of this feeling he glared at them savagely, as he opened his errand to his friend;—and even the genial smiling face of the latter looked grave while he listened to Arthur's story.

“It is a pretty big thing you are attempting!” he said at last, after a careful examination of the documents before him, “and in which you are suggesting to me to take part. A fight to the death with the whole Sherwood family.”

"Do you doubt my facts?" demanded Arthur, his eyes still following the swaying masses of humanity.

The other observed him curiously with a sort of unwilling approval. "No," he said at last, "they are too well attested and I have learned by now to trust your word."

"Is it then that you are afraid?" he sneered.

"N-o; not for myself. I have had a tussle before with Charles Sherwood and did not come off so badly; besides, there is no doubt that this will be a tremendous scoop for my paper and double its sales. No, I was thinking of you."

Arthur by a great effort left off his monotonous watch and forced himself to meet his companion's eyes.

"And what of me?" he inquired.

"Why do you do it, Arthur?" the other asked reproachfully. "Have you not fights enough already on your hands without taking up another, and a fight with a man like this? It is like David and Goliath!"

"Which came off victor?"

"I am sure I do not remember, it is so long since I went to Sunday School. But if you must publish this miserable story, at least do not sign your name to it."

Arthur sprang up furiously and striding to the window pushed it open, letting in the muffled roar of the traffic and the soft southern breeze.

"Strike in the dark," he said, "never! I am glad to put what little reputation I have at the service of a woman who has been wronged."

The keen eyes watching him softened a little, even while their owner shook his head.

"Heaven knows what good you will be likely to get from it! However, as I have often told you, Arthur, you are like all geniuses—a bit of a fool. I will publish it, and the consequences be upon your own head!"

Arthur turned on him savagely.

"You must do it to-day then," he snarled, "for I am not the only person who knows, and others may get in ahead of you."

"Oh! I see you know how to tempt me!" answered his friend with a smile and a shrug. "Very well, Arthur, it shall come out this afternoon."

During this time Jack was bidding his family a gay farewell. The boat was crowded, and the troops of friends coming to see him off gave to the scene all the character of an afternoon tea. Jack was in the best of spirits, laughing, talking, jesting, and overwhelming every one with cheerful banter. His father watched him with an affectionate pride, relieved to see him look so well, even if the cause was the prospect of getting away; his sisters made their usual comments upon Jack's incessant desire for change and travel; while Isabel alone watched him quietly and sadly, with the furtive look of dread in her eyes. He detained her a moment at the last.

"Isabel," he said, "it seems almost a shame to go away like this without you; but you do not mind, do you? Tell me you are quite willing I should go."

"Of course, Jack, I am very glad to have you go."

He took her in his arms and kissed her twice.

"Here is one for Bennie and one for you! I am almost sorry you are not going. You were always a good sport and died game!" And she wondered if there was a prophetic meaning in his words.

"Come, Jack," said his father, "we must go. Be as careful as you can of yourself and come back well. I shall prefer that to your shooting any number of lions." And they shook hands, while for the last time Charles Sherwood's eyes lingered on the face of this much loved son with pride as well as affection.

After they had left the vessel and were standing upon the dock waiting for her to sail away, Mr. Sherwood was attracted by the sight of a vehicle driven at full speed along the pier. The wizened old horse was being urged to his utmost by a constant application of the whip, and he wheezed and puffed quite as noisily as the carriage he drew, and which rattled over the pavement like the typical one-horse shay. The red-faced driver had a face as shiny as the brim of his black glazed hat, and he shouted and swore, guiding his way in and out of the waiting groups, holding on to a large trunk the while, which at every lurch the carriage made seemed in imminent danger of tumbling out on to the heads of the passers by.

"That woman, for I am sure it is a woman, has come within an ace of losing the boat," Mr. Sherwood said to Isabel, by way of distracting her mind; but Isabel was looking towards the place where her husband stood, and did not turn her head. Mr. Sherwood was right; it was a woman, and she had opened the carriage door and sprung out, revealing

to him a pretty, frightened, white face, heavily veiled.

"She looks as though she were in pursuit of some one," he thought, with his customary acuteness, as he noticed her excited, guilty look, but he little knew that it was the sight of his face to which this expression was due. However, the carriage was surrounded now and vociferous porters were busily occupied in bearing the lady's belongings over the gangway plank, and as after paying the cabman, she hastily followed, she cast one long lingering look in the direction of Isabel, and then disappeared within the boat. The plank was lifted; the anchor raised and the huge vessel sailed away; but Mr. Sherwood was left with a vivid remembrance of the lady's look.

It was rather a silent party who drove home through the snowy streets. Isabel was to have luncheon at Mr. Sherwood's, and she found herself almost glad of the fact and relieved to put off until later her return to a solitary house. She had arranged for one of her cousins to spend the time of Jack's absence with her, but at present she and Bennie were quite alone.

The luncheon had been delayed and dragged its weary length along until after three o'clock; for Elizabeth would have regarded it as unbefitting not to celebrate Jack's departure by an unusually full meal; her family feeling invariably taking the form of good things to eat. Isabel, as she toyed with the food on her plate, vainly trying to eat enough to avoid comment, wondered dully why it had not a better taste, and decided that like everything else

belonging to her sister-in-law, it was too laboured to be good. She wondered also why her throat felt so stiff and dry and why she experienced such a hideous sinking of the heart, and it struck her in the nature of a presentiment. She felt more than ever convinced of it later when as they were having coffee in the drawing-room a card was brought to her. She glanced at it mechanically and the colour for the moment left her face, for it was Walter's and he had written across it in pencil. "I must see you for a moment on a matter of importance." Still under the influence of the same feeling, she handed it to Mr. Sherwood, who stood beside her, and in a haste that was almost breathless, she followed the footman to the small reception room where Walter waited; the fact of his sending for her in this way filling her with a nameless terror, which she could no longer control. The sight of his face was not reassuring; it was pale and his eyes were full of pity, even while his mouth twitched with excitement; an excitement touched with a curious streak of elation.

"Mrs. Sherwood," he began in his stiffly formal manner, "I cannot bear to disturb you, but I have got to prepare you for bad news. I found this out too late to prevent it, but I cannot let it come on you unawares."

Her face hardly changed, it almost seemed to her that she had expected it from the first, as she said:

"What has happened?"

"The worst!"

The pity had deepened in his eyes even while she noted the contrast with his twitching mouth.

"You mean everything is known?" she asked.

"Yes; it is published in to-night's paper."

"Ah!" she exclaimed bitterly, "then that is why Jack went away!"

"What is?" asked a voice behind them, and Mr. Sherwood appeared at the doorway. By a strange intuition he had drawn the same conclusion from Walter's card as had Isabel, and he feared for his son.

Isabel went over and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Dear Mr. Sherwood," she said, "it is something about Jack."

His mouth stiffened and he drew himself up as if to meet a blow.

"What is it?" he asked in a voice harsh from anxiety, and looking at Walter; but the latter faced him undaunted, with his curious mixture of elation and distress.

"There is a story in regard to your son, Mr. Sherwood, which appears in to-night's *Mercury*, and I feared that you and Mrs. Sherwood would see it without warning."

Mr. Sherwood made a quick motion towards the telephone, but Walter stepped in front of it.

"It is too late for that now! Do you think I should be here without doing everything that could be done?" he cried, and his voice had a note of pain as well as of triumph. "No, Mr. Sherwood, the

paper is printed and distributed, and my cousin has signed his name to it. I learned all this half an hour ago, too late to do anything but tell you."

Mr. Sherwood drew himself up with cold dignity. "And what is this story against my son that you are both evidently afraid to repeat to me?" he asked coldly.

At this instant the butler appeared at the door.

"There is a gentleman here, sir, who says he must see you at once. I think," he concluded with pleased excitement, "it is a reporter."

"Tell him I am out!" thundered Mr. Sherwood, "and send at once for a copy of the *Mercury*."

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?" demanded Margaret, appearing at this moment with her husband. "We must go, Father; Henry has an engagement."

"It will keep," said Mr. Sherwood drily. "Henry, I want you a moment. Oh!" as the man returned with a blanched face and excited eyes, "here is the paper,—two in fact. Now we shall see what they have dared to print against my son!" and he put on his glasses and carried the paper to the light. Isabel had sunk into a chair. Walter approached Henry Corning and silently handed him the other one, which his wife read too, leaning over his shoulder. Suddenly they were startled by a loud exclamation, as Mr. Sherwood dropped his paper and put his hand to his head. The next moment, before they could reach him, he had recovered himself and strode over to his daughter-in-law.

"Isabel!" he said in an awful voice, "is this true?"

Her lips formed the word "Yes," though no sound came from them.

"And Jack knew it and ran away!"

She sat up and faced him silently, and they looked into each other's eyes.

"Yes," she answered again, and without another word he left her and strode to the window.

Margaret was weeping silently, and the rest waited, for they knew not what, overwhelmed at the sight of this stern grief. It was not very long, however, before Mr. Sherwood returned to them again, his face changed almost beyond recognition, but with no other evidence of disturbance about him. He turned at once to Walter; and there was a challenge in his voice.

"You have some knowledge of this, do you know this woman?"

Walter's eyes met his and it seemed as if he replied to it as he answered:

"Yes."

For a full moment Mr. Sherwood's eyes searched him while Isabel watched them breathlessly; then there leaped into her eyes a look of relief and Mr. Sherwood turned away satisfied. What she felt for Walter then was not love, that feeling had been swallowed up in one of reverent devotion. Mr. Sherwood continued in a matter of fact tone:

"Then come at once to my study and let me know the facts. I want you too, Henry. Isabel, my child, you had better go home. I will see you to-morrow."

Margaret went to her and put her arms about her, saying: "Let me take you home, Isabel."

"No," she replied, disengaging herself, "I am better alone. But," she added with a change of tone, "it is kind of you, Margaret, to offer," and she rose and went to the door. Walter had moved towards her, but was forestalled by Mr. Sherwood who, stepping past him, went with her to the carriage. He met Catherine and her husband with Elizabeth in the hall on his return.

"What has happened, Father?" began the latter; "there have been two reporters here already, and they say it is something about Jack."

"Read that!" he answered sternly, handing her the paper, "and try to talk about it as little as you can. If there is anything left to be done I shall do it." And he disappeared into his own room, leaving his daughters a prey to feelings too tumultuous for description.

"I always said," murmured Elizabeth a little later, through her tears, "that some day she would do something to disgrace us."

"She was never the wife for Jack," sobbed Catherine; "she did not understand him or know how to take him."

"It would never have come out but for your friend Arthur Hinsdale!" wailed Elizabeth, "and poor Jack never liked him; and oh, Margaret, did I not beg and pray you to give him up?"

Margaret made absolutely no reply to this, but sat as if turned to stone.

"I always thought Jack lacked moral principle," gasped Elizabeth, "but I thought at least he was a gentleman, and to take up with a woman like that."

At this moment Henry Corning appeared at the door.

"Margaret, I have come to take you home. I think there is nothing more we can do here."

She followed him in silence to the carriage, and after they entered it she leaned against him sobbing.

"Oh, Henry, it seems as if this time it was again my fault! Arthur Hinsdale was my friend and I would not give him up!"

"As far as I can make out," her husband answered, "Hinsdale spoke the truth in defence of a woman he loved, and your being his friend would not affect that one way or the other," and then he told her what he had heard from Walter.

That evening before retiring Margaret wrote this letter to Arthur:

"I do not entirely understand your reasons for what you did; but I want to tell you that, knowing you, I appreciate that they were dictated by no unkindness to us, but by a sense of what you thought was right.

"Always your friend,

"MARGARET CORNING."

Verily Margaret has made strides in powers of sympathy since the time of our first meeting with her.

CHAPTER XXX

"She hugged the offender
And forgave the offense
Sex to the last."

DRYDEN.

IT is impossible to give any adequate idea of the interest excited by Arthur's article. New York buzzed like a beehive, or like a country village, which on those occasions it formerly resembled. Everywhere people were talking, condemning, abusing, pitying, blaming, or condoning one or more of the people concerned. Everywhere, at the clubs, in restaurants, at the opera, at private tables, and in public thoroughfares, one heard but the same subject—the scandal in the Sherwood family. Everywhere the tide of public opinion set against Jack, sweeping everything before it, his flight intensifying all. As was rightly said, "He has not even the courage of his vices," and there remained not one friend to take his part.

Of Isabel the feeling was more mixed. There was pity on all sides, of course, and she had a large party of devoted admirers, mostly among the men; but those who disliked her scored now, and were able to blame where they had formerly been forced to praise. New York was smaller then and had more time for both, and public opinion is proverbially fickle, and

Isabel had sometimes affronted its most cherished dictums.

There was one person, however, whom all united to praise and pity—Jeannie. Those who knew her (Mrs. Coffin among the foremost) spoke of her beauty, her talent and her heroic struggles for self-support. Those who did not pitied her trusting affection and praised her noble disinterestedness. She, who had thought herself the daughter-in-law of a multi-millionaire, had struggled bravely against want rather than ask help from the family of the man who had abandoned her, while only the devoted courage of a friend, touched with pity by her noble sacrifice, had at length given her story to the world.

Assuredly this version, though not in so many words Arthur's, was really the logical result of his article and a melancholy example of how an effort for justice could go astray; while he, paying for it almost with his heart's blood, triumphed at the thought of the wrong he had been able to right; and the good his victory had been allowed to accomplish. Verily, of all satires on earth, the greatest comes from an attempt to play the part of Providence in the lives of men.

But Jeannie was unfortunately debarred from reaping the reward of this sudden popularity, for when the next day reporters and photographers besieged her studio, bearing floral offerings from would-be sympathisers of the male sex, they were one and all confronted by a card bearing the legend "Out of Town" which she had herself affixed upon the panel of the door. They were obliged to content

themselves with such data as could be obtained from the janitor, who being very deaf, and having beside an impediment in his speech, was not the most satisfactory informant they could have had. "Ye-s, Miss Caxton wa-s away." "Where had she gone?" "Do-on' know." "When did he expect her back?" "Can-n't say." "Was she staying with friends?" "Sup-pose so," etc., until they finally gave it up in despair.

Even Jeannie's best friends were equally at sea as to her whereabouts, for no word came from her and they were therefore obliged to content themselves with conjectures; even Arthur not being able to afford them any further clue.

Arthur himself was suffering from a reaction after the weeks of continuous effort and harrowing anxiety, which he had spent. He felt so weak and broken, that even Jeannie's absence, unexpected as it was, failed to arouse him. He accepted it, as he did everything else, with a kind of dreary apathy more sad to witness than any violence would have been.

This did not signify that he had lost his love for Jeannie; but that he was at present physically incapable of loving any woman; even, as at times after an operation the patient's vitality is so impaired as to dull all powers of feeling. With Arthur's apathy there began also to mingle a burning shame at the effect of his action on her; and an equally burning self-reproach at its effect on himself. He had felt so sure of his freedom from prejudice and indiffer-

ence to popular opinion, and justly so where he himself was concerned; but not where it related to her. The publicity which he had brought upon her, cut him like a knife, even while he tried to convince himself that it did not really matter. He dared not acknowledge what it was that mattered—not Jack Sherwood; not her disgrace; not even her deceit to him;—but her total lack of any sense of shame!—and somewhere, somehow, in the back of his mind, he kept going over the text "*For there is a sin into death*";—but even then he refused to connect it with Jeannie; he continued to apply it to the man, upon whom he still tried to lay the blame of her fault.

Just two weeks after Jack Sherwood's departure a letter arrived from him, directed to his father, and somehow Mr. Sherwood in opening it experienced a faint premonition of evil, and by one of those curious illusions, that no theory can satisfactorily explain, he seemed to have a fleeting vision of the pretty, frightened face, belonging to the lady he had seen upon leaving the steamer, the day his son sailed.

A curious coincidence indeed for the same post carried a letter directed to Arthur, which bore the signature of that same lady.


Arthur was in a better mood that day than he had been in some time. He had begun to recover from the shock he had received at Mrs. Coffin's and also from the fatigue he had endured; and as a result of this improved physical condition, his natural loyalty and faith had had a chance to reassert itself. He began to make excuses for Jeannie; he began to

justify what he had formerly blamed, and when it was impossible to do either, he pitied and sympathised with her. This was particularly the case in her attempt to expose Jack Sherwood. Arthur as he reviewed the matter had acknowledged, even to himself, certain doubts as to the propriety of his action,—at least as it related to Jeannie;—but this did not by any means extend to her share in bringing it about. On the contrary, he was overwhelmed at her courage and magnanimity.

“Another woman would have been afraid to speak the truth,” he thought with pride. “She would have been conventional and cowardly; but Jeannie is a true modern woman in her scorn of prejudice!”

How exactly Arthur proposed to reconcile this view with that of his own folly, which had been steadily dawning on him, it is impossible to tell for at that time arrived Jeannie’s letter containing her own explanation.

It reached him late one morning when the rare sunlight, which the high building allowed him, was lighting up his rooms; and he sat close to the window, warming his heart at the blaze. He knew how transient it was; knew that in one short hour it would be over and the light which he loved would be gone; and yet he was inexpressibly thankful for its short radiance. For one hour of the day he was happy, elated, able to look out with hopeful energy upon life; for one hour he watched the brightening of his home; saw the colours deepen on the old wood of his furniture; glow in the leather binding of his books;



lighten the faded depth of his rugs; and then all fade gradually away again into its usual dull drab. And as often as it did so, he would shake his fist at the tall building opposite, and swear softly under his breath at the man who had stolen his sun. But to-day he forgot to do this as he read Jeannie's letter. He opened it without noticing the postmark, and with hardly a sensation of fear, indeed the first few lines tended to reassure him, and he had read several pages before he gained an inkling of their meaning. For this was what Jeannie said:

"Arthur dearest:

"You have always told me that your one desire was to see me happy, and so I know that, in spite of everything, your strongest feeling will be one of relief when I tell you that at last I am happy, as I had never hoped to be again. And I feel, Arthur dearest, that in one sense I owe it to you, for it is only through what you did for me that I was enabled to bring it all about. For if you had not made my story public, perhaps Jack would have lacked the moral courage to make the break, knowing the pain it would entail upon his family. But we both feel that now we have a perfect right to consider our own happiness, having neither of us any moral scruple to prevent our doing so, and knowing that you are sufficiently broad-minded to take the same view. I feel that Jack is by right my husband, and now that you have made it possible for him to acknowledge me before the world, he has lost no time ending a

connection of spiritual adultery by declaring his intentions of getting a divorce from his wife and marrying me. This will of course involve great sacrifices for us both, he of money, and I of a career, and we may be obliged, owing to people's wicked prejudice, to expatriate ourselves for a time; but what does that matter, so we are together and able to lead the life that by right belongs to every one—the right to be happy our own way. And you cannot think what unflinching gratitude I feel to you, Arthur dearest, for having made this possible by your unparalleled generosity in clearing me from the cruel charges against me, and it cuts me to the heart to think that I was obliged to leave you just at that time without a word; but Arthur, my place was at his side! I knew what he would suffer at first, and I felt that as it was in some measure my doing, it was for me to make up to him for the pain I had unavoidably caused him. My part in this was cruel but necessary; and I have spared him the knowledge of it, knowing how it would grieve him, and I am sure that I can depend on you to do likewise. Believe me we can never either of us forget what we owe to you, and he feels as I do that all our happiness has been made possible by your kindness. I know how you will miss me, and I wish that I might have spared you this, as well as every other pain in life; but dear, you will come in time to realise that it was all for the best. You are too noble for me. I belong right down here on the earth with Jack; while you are of those great souls who give their life to art! And wherever you are,

and whatever you do that is great and fine, there will be no one in the world who will rejoice more or be prouder of you than

"Your own

"JEANNIE."

"Poor little Jeannie," Mrs. Coffin said when her son had communicated to her as much of this letter as Arthur had seen fit to reveal, "misguided of course; but such an affectionate little soul and so clever that she talks you over every time. Such a treasure as she would have been to any man in public life, and to think she should be thrown away on Jack Sherwood!"

"She is well suited to him, it seems to me!" he replied with an ineffable contempt which escaped his mother's ear.

"You mean she may be able to reform him?" she answered composedly, "and she is quite right in thinking herself unsuited to Arthur. I said so from the first."

"She is beyond me, I confess," Walter replied. "I cannot understand such a combination of caprice and duplicity."

"It is plain, my son, that you have never been in love," said his mother with austere complacency. "I am not justifying Jeannie, of course, but I can at least appreciate her motives. She hated Jack Sherwood for deserting her for another woman, and she wanted to force him to break with his wife and turn to her again, and what better way could she have

found than to get Arthur to make her story public. As I say, I am not justifying her, but it was a very natural thing to do and so clever."

"It was a blackguardly low down trick and Arthur is well rid of her!" answered her son, struggling between sympathy for his cousin, disgust for Jeannie, and a wild mad joy at the result of her action, coupled with a wealth of pity and love for the woman she had supplanted.

"I thought I knew Arthur," he went on wearily; "but he has surprised even me. His conduct is so sublimely inconsequent that I am convinced he must be the great genius that he has always imagined himself to be," and he reckoned truer than he supposed.

CHAPTER XXXI

"Yet see, he mastereth himself and makes
His torture tributary to his will.
Had he been one of us, he would have made
An awful spirit."

BYRON—"Manfred."

THE night after the arrival of these letters two men sat alone, each struggling vainly with his own grief, and each striving to rise above it to some form of healing activity. With Charles Sherwood, sentiment played usually so small a part that the excess of feeling he had experienced that day tended to annihilate him. He had conquered it for the time in his efforts to obtain the information by which to guide his course; but he knew that it would descend on him again as soon as the need for exertion had passed, and he felt almost incapable of bearing it. Now that he was at last alone, that the horror which confronted him could be no longer banished, but must, like the ghost in Hamlet, remain to torture him throughout the night, he felt renewed despair sweep over him.

He had loved Jack—in his own cold way—but still he had loved him, and Jack was dead, as absolutely and entirely so as though his dead body was now lying at his father's feet. What mattered it if Jack's actual body was still on this earth, if the spirit with

which he had credited it were gone forever; and if Jack had failed in just those points which he had most valued in him, viz., courage, truth, and a sense of honour.

We have said that Mr. Sherwood loved Jack. He had also, through some strange confusion of mind, been proud of him; and the affection and the pride were so intertwined that it was impossible to destroy the one without uprooting the other also. The pride had never justified the love and was aroused by qualities inconsistent with it, but that mattered little now when both were gone forever.

Mr. Sherwood, facing this fact, felt for a time a despair so overmastering as to affect his powers of reasoning. His interest had so long centred about Jack that when that central point was gone, everything else seemed to crumble about it; but as we have said, it was only for a time. Then his cold, clear mind reasserted itself, and showed him things again, just as they were, illuminating the whole sordid scene as by a flash of light, in which he recognised, without prejudice and without illusion, just what had taken place;—and to him again it was plain Jack was dead! There was nothing which could alter or change, or palliate or annihilate what he had done, either in his father's or the world's eyes—therefore there remained only to bury him decently and with such ceremony as good usage required—already in his own mind occurred the text of a letter announcing his ultimatum to his son; the income of a fixed sum for life as long as he remained abroad—and then what remained to *him*—only *Jack's son!*

At the thought, suddenly a flash returned to his eye, a tiny warmth to his heart, a faint throb of returning human feeling.

"Bennie must take his father's place," he said to himself. "He has a good mother and she has trained him well, but—will she give him up? And then positively with returning animation and energy, "She must,—she shall. It is the only way." And he got up and began to pace the floor.

All night long he continued that weary pacing to and fro, but when morning dawned Mr. Sherwood had won his hardest fight—that with himself; and he undressed and went quietly to bed, gaining some few hours of sleep with which to acquire strength for another day, the day in which would begin his struggle—for Bennie. Of Jeannie he hardly thought, still less of Arthur Hinsdale; what were they, pawns in a game which by some strange chance had been allowed to injure him, that was all? If affection could not turn him from his path, neither could evil passions bear a part; he towered above them both, his firm, indomitable will controlling all.

In this respect he resembled Arthur Hinsdale, and the resemblance held good in this dark hour of their lives; for beneath all the passionate warmth of Arthur's nature, there lived the same firm belief in himself, in his power to wage a fight, and his strength to carry it through to the bitter end; and for him the end had now come. Like Mr. Sherwood, he had summoned all his strength to meet the blow of Jeannie's loss, and the loss was a final one. As in Jack's case, for him Jeannie was dead, and it was her obse-

quies that he had turned into a triumphal pæon of vengeance.

With him, too, his love and his respect were so entwined that the loss of one meant the loss of the other; only in his case, his love had been unselfish enough to linger, in the service of the woman it had once enriched with every charm and virtue.

He had given his help freely; he had put at her service all his small means; all his energy; and at last the full worth of all his talent. And now it was over; she was cleared and avenged, and he was left alone in the night with his grief.

At first it seemed to Arthur, as to Charles Sherwood, that his burden was greater than he could bear; and that the flood of grief which overwhelmed him was so great that under it his mind must give way. In fact at first the swarm of fancies which beset him was so confused and bewildering, that he felt entirely powerless beneath it, and he seemed to himself to be watching another man in the pangs of a mortal woe. And it seemed to him that this other man was such a fool as to be hardly deserving of pity, and for a moment he shook with laughter at the thought of this other's plight; while the next he clenched his fists and beat them against his forehead, crying out that the light of his life had gone out. All night this wild variation of mood continued, and racked him as the hot and cold spells rack the victim of a fever; at once with pity and contempt at the result of his own act. It was the same as regards Jeannie, for at one moment he cursed her for her perfidy, at another he called on her with every expression of

love and sympathy. And thus mood succeeded mood and fury followed fury until Arthur barely knew himself where his real strength stood.

Then all at once a new light seemed to break upon his soul, and like all poets he felt able to utilise his very pain to assist him in an effort of creation; while out of the chaos in which his mind floundered, there emerged one feeling intact—his deep burning scorn of injustice. And as with Charles Sherwood, in this effort at resistance, in this determined attempt to struggle against his distress, there came to him the beginning of his cure.

"I cannot bear my trouble," Arthur thought; "I shall sink under it and I have no one to help me now! I must rouse myself and carry on the fight against injustice which I began for her; the cause of the weak and suffering against their oppressors." And as he thought this, words again came to him, and he went to his desk and blindly wrote them down.

Little did Arthur dream that these words, written from the depths of his despair, were winged messengers to carry his thought to the world; that the quality of greatness, so elusive heretofore, clothed them as with a garment, giving them power to inspire other hearts, to transfigure other lives, and to touch other souls with the light that burned within his own. Little did he dream that compared to them all his efforts would count as naught; his zeal as futile; his struggles as useless, and his actions as barren of result; that the poem which he wrote now and inscribed "Injustice" would be known wherever the English language was read; that when his life had

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ended and all his pitiful efforts had ceased, dead as the heart which had once beat so bravely for them, then the words he had written would live, and burn their way into the hearts of his adversaries; giving their author immortality; giving his cause victory; but giving them both when he was no longer there to see.

But Arthur did not know. He only wrote, and felt that some of the bitterness had passed from his soul.

CHAPTER XXXII

"There is no more mercy in him, than there is milk in a male tiger."

SHAKESPEARE—"Coriolanus."

SEVERAL months later Isabel sat awaiting a visit from her father-in-law and struggling vainly against the feeling of oppression which it entailed. She said to herself that this was due to the fact that it was their first meeting since the decree which had given her an absolute release from her husband together with the custody of her child. Mr. Sherwood had never failed to call on her daily at this same hour since his son left; but strangely enough, after the very first, he had never mentioned Jack's name, referring all business questions to his lawyer. She was left to divine his feelings by her own, and there had been no mention between them, of any plans for Bennie, though she had made no secret of her intention of taking him abroad with her for a prolonged stay, as soon as matters were settled. This absolute silence on his part, in the midst of her preparations for departure, filled her in her own despite, with a nameless sense of fear, and she could not divest herself of the feeling that something lay behind it which she longed yet dreaded to learn. So that to-day, when he entered she looked at him with an expression of inquiring apprehension, as though striving to pen-

trate behind the mask which covered his impenetrable face. She looked at him and she saw that he had grown suddenly very old. There are times when there is a transition, almost without warning, from middle life to old age, and this change had come to him now.

And as she realised this, she felt at the same moment that his silence was about to be broken, and she nerved herself, as though for a struggle against what he was about to say.

He sat down and eyed her calmly, as he asked in his cold even tones,

"Tell me, now that it is over, how long had you known about this?"

"About a year."

"Ah!"

A pause, while they still looked at each other, and at last Mr. Sherwood asked:

"Why did you not tell me?"

She smiled hopelessly. "What good would it have done to destroy your faith in Jack?"

"I might have helped you!"

She came nearer and laid her hand on his arm, while it seemed as if, all at once, she strove to put into words her own feeling.

"Mr. Sherwood, it was bound to come! I have felt it so from the first. It was only a question of time and the means, but in the end it had to be! I have seen it always, this sword of Damocles, suspended by a thin cord above my head! I went to bed with it before me, and woke up and saw it hanging there. I watched for it in every public place

which I visited, and saw it over the face of every new acquaintance I met. There were times when I was tempted to cut it myself and bear the worst at once, but I could not, on account of Bennie."

"It is because of Bennie that I am here!"

She did not answer and he went on:

"About you the case is far simpler, for you will marry Walter Coffin. Ah! you need not look at me in that way. This is no time to mince words between us. You will marry him and in time forget; but with Bennie it is different; he has no longer a father."

"He has his mother still!"

She watched his face intently for his answer, and then suddenly in reply to a look she saw there:

"Bennie belongs to me!" she cried. "He is mine, and you have no right over him!"

"It is not a question of right, but of what is best for Bennie. You have his interest at heart."

"Have I not shown it!"

"Then continue to do so. Listen to me, Isabel, and let us talk this matter over calmly; things are bad enough without adding to them by exaggerated sentiment. Have you thought what Bennie's life will be with you if you take him from me? You know he has no right to any property of mine."

She looked him unflinchingly in the eyes.

"I have my own means, small as they are," she said proudly. "Do you think I want your money?"

"Not for yourself, but for your son, yes; you ought to want it. If Bennie goes with you, he will be deprived of everything which the world counts of value.

I have the power to protect him—even against his father—”

“Mr. Sherwood!”

“Yes, Isabel, Jack has promised that while Bennie remains with me, he will make no effort to see him.” She started up with a smothered cry while he went quietly on. “From henceforth Jack is dead to me; I have renounced him, and you know I do not change. It depends on you whether I do the same for Bennie. If you take him away now, he will never have a cent more from me.”

She caught his hand.

“For God’s sake, what do you wish me to do? Think what your son has made of me, and now do you intend to finish his work and take away my only child!”

“You may have other children; you are young and will get over it, but I never shall.”

She was struck, even in her despair, at the sound of his voice, which expressed the hopeless, pitiful grief of the aged, for whom all hope is dead.

“Have pity on me, Isabel; I am an old man and Jack was all I had, and I have lost him. Do not take Bennie from me! Give me the boy and I will bring him up like my own son!”

She wrung her hands, glancing at him with an unselfish grief, which was lost upon him, as she answered:

“I am trying to do what is best for my boy. He has his father’s blood in his veins, and you brought Jack up! I have struggled to overcome it with Bennie, but the taint is there and I can feel it! What

certainly have I that he will not go the way his father did—with you?"

And even as she spoke she seemed to see before her as though written in letters of fire these words of an old Jesuit priest. "Give me a child the first five years of his life and you may have the rest," and Mr. Sherwood's answer voiced them.

"Because you are his mother and have given him your spirit and training; and I swear to you, Isabel, that I will continue it. I have not long to live, and nothing that I own brings me any comfort. Let me have the boy. It will not be for long!"

The cold voice softened for a moment, became pleading; but even as it did so, the cold eyes watched her;—as with generous people, there are others always to take advantage of their magnanimity. Isabel's intuition had come to his assistance, showing her, as in an open book, her father-in-law's agony, while he, utilising even his suffering, knew how to turn it towards the consummation of his wishes. For she suffered vicariously with him, reading his grief by the illuminating light of her own, striving to work out the right without regard to herself, piecing out the feeling of another by the power of her sympathy, as he had felt from the first that she would do.

And though he used her and her devotion to her boy, as he had before used Walter—as he would always continue to use every one about him—yet he did justice at the same time to her magnanimity; for he meant well by her, as he meant well by all who aided, instead of thwarting his wishes.

She flung her hands above her head with a move-

ment of despair, and began to pace the room, while he continued voicing for her her own doubts and fears.

"If you take Bennie away and deprive him of my protection now, can you answer to him later for what you have done? How can you assure his future if you refuse all help from me? You think you are sure of Walter Coffin's love; for yourself, yes; but how about Bennie? Will he not come between you then, as he has come before, and ruin both your lives?"

She put out her hand to stop him, but he went mercilessly on.

"I can give your son everything of which my son has deprived him."

"Except a mother's love," she murmured.

"And do you not give him the greatest proof of that when you put him above everything on earth, even your own love? Isabel, be merciful to him, as to me! Give me the boy! If you do not you may be doing him a bitter wrong, and he may live to reproach you for it all his life."

She sank down upon the arm chair, where she had sat before while talking to Walter, and somehow the thought of that interview and of this became confused and mingled in her mind, until she felt that Walter was sitting opposite her beside Mr. Sherwood, and for the first time she noted the resemblance between them—not in their features but in their minds—and her imagination played such tricks with her that she fancied it was Walter's voice which urged Mr. Sherwood's plea. For she felt that she could trust Wal-

ter's love for herself; but not for her boy; that he would not and could not take his father's place; as his grandfather could and did. And if she stood between them now, she felt what the result would be;—for Mr. Sherwood possessed the rare gift of making his threats count like accomplished acts. She knew that no force from without could turn that iron will; as he had given Jack up, so would he do with Bennie, if she resisted him—and *perhaps he might be right?* Isabel's mind working in her weakened body with lightning rapidity went over point by point Mr. Sherwood's reasoning. Bennie belonged by right here with his father's family, and her love could never make it up, if he broke with them through her. It was as though she had foreseen it all when resisting Walter's love, except that now through another's guilt she had lost the power to save her own child;—and if she resisted now it would not be she who paid, but Bennie. Whichever way she turned she seemed to see a vicious circle of pain.

She wrung her hands together in agony, and she looked at the man beside her as though in mute appeal; but the rigid face did not vary. She watched the clock on the mantel and she saw that its hands pointed towards ten o'clock and she thought:

"When it strikes I must do something," but, alas, she felt that she was powerless. She strove to speak, to argue her own cause, to make an appeal to his compassion, but the words refused to come; frozen by the look on his face, that face which recalled to her a rock, against which the surf dashes itself to atoms in vain.

The clock on the mantel gave out one clear chime, and she clasped her hands together as though in prayer; but the face did not change; another stroke and her lips moved, though no sound came as she prayed: "God give me strength to get through!" And she watched the face opposite and for a moment it seemed to her that it softened; but the next she saw that she was mistaken, for it had become as before. And then all hope within her died, and she set her teeth together and unclasped her hands as she said to herself: "When the clock has struck I will speak," and the clock struck ten.

Did he feel no pity for the woman he was thus torturing? Perhaps yes, but no pity for any human being had ever come between Charles Sherwood and his purpose, and it did not now, even when she turned to him at last with a blank look of despair, entreating:

"Give me a little more time!"

When Walter had urged the same request he had not hesitated to grant it, and at first he made a motion as though about to accede; but the next moment he checked himself and looked at her, and what he saw convinced him of the danger of delay.

"No," he said harshly, "I must have your answer now. Time cannot change facts."

"No," she gasped, "you are right there! Even God cannot do that!"

She thought she spoke the words aloud; but in reality, it was only in her mind that she uttered them, for though her lips moved, no sound had escaped. She listened to Mr. Sherwood's steps as he paced

slowly up and down the room and to the ticking of the clock as the hands crawled around the dial, and it seemed to her that they had the same inexorable sound.

"No," she kept repeating to herself, "time cannot change facts—or him!"

And as this conviction flashed upon her, it almost seemed that she was bearing in her own person the pain of all those others, striving to undo the result of sins not their own; crushed by natural laws, or else in good faith defying them, and broken by the very force of the laws they defied. For it is the curse of sins like Jack's to make such sacrifices necessary and belongs to them of right, as Mr. Sherwood well knew.

She got up at last and crept across the room to his side, steadying herself as she did so and holding on to the chairs as she passed. He waited silently, not offering to help her, his body tense; his mind alert only on one point. What would her decision be? Their eyes met and she asked tonelessly:

"If I give him up to you, will you swear to protect him from his father, and to bring him up to be unlike him and to respect his mother's memory?"

"I do."

"Very well, Mr. Sherwood, you may have the boy. May God do to you as you do to him!"

He went to her and took her hand.

"I am sorry, Isabel, for what you suffer. Some day you will see that I am right!"

"Perhaps!"

"Good-bye. I wish you had been my daughter,

for then things might have worked out differently. I shall always wish you well."

And he stooped and kissed her, turning away quickly to avoid the sight of her eyes. And she flung herself down, murmuring brokenly:

"Oh! my child, my darling! I have given you up and you will never know now how much I have loved you!"

How long she sat there she never knew, for she was like a person who had been drugged and wounded and who is roused only by their own intense pain. As she came to herself, however, her mind began to work automatically, showing her that she had lived through this time long before, and had indeed already prepared for it; else why the dread she had felt all along, when planning almost in flight her coming journey?

Her journey! The thought roused her to complete self-consciousness, and at first to a numbing sense of pain. She must go alone! *without Bennie!* The next moment, the magnitude of her despair steadied her; she rose and strove to pull herself together. Her mind had become now suddenly very clear, and she felt calm and almost coldly acquiescent.

"I have borne all I can," she thought. "I must save myself now. I have reached my limit!"

For a moment she thought of Walter, and her hand stole to a letter, which she had left unanswered and wore next her heart—he had gone south on business for Mr. Sherwood and it was long since she had seen

him and he was expected back soon; but her face did not relax.

"I cannot bear even his sympathy! I must be alone, and there are *seven more days* before I sail!"

With this another thought came to her, and with it a sudden resolution. She took up the morning paper; the first page was full of her own name; but she turned from it to the sailing list. Yes, the sister ship, to the one on which she was to have gone, left the next morning. Her maid entered at this moment with an anxious expression. She had been with Isabel since her marriage and was devoted to her.

"Let me bring you something to eat, Mrs. Sherwood," she said, "at least a cup of tea."

"Very well, Mary." Then detaining her, "I am going abroad sooner than I expected. You will come with me, will you not?"

"Of course; but, oh! Mrs. Sherwood—"

"Mary, I have given up the boy to his grandfather, and I cannot stand it here any longer. Do not ask me questions, but help me. Pack everything of mine to-day, and do not tell my plans to any one or let anybody come near me for I shall be very busy. We must be on board to-night."

"Very well, Mrs. Sherwood."

She sent Bennie away to play with his little cousins, and herself made all the necessary arrangements. None of the family visited her, probably prevented by Mr. Sherwood, and by evening everything was done. She waited for the time at dusk, after his supper, which she often spent with him, and then

went to her boy. Bennie sat on a stool, playing with his little dog and looking out of the window, for even he felt a little subdued that evening.

She went up and kneeled down beside the child.

"Bennie," she said, "do you love your mother?"

"Of course, very much," stroking her cheek.

"You are a nice Mamma and you smile so much."

"Better than Toodles?" she asked falteringly.

Bennie had a perceptible struggle, but at last:

"Yes, better than Toodles," he said manfully.

"Bennie, my lamb, will you always love me?"

"Of course! Why do you cry, Mamma? You never have before, and you told me not to."

"It is because I must leave you, Bennie!"

"Leave me!" with a wail of distress, clinging to her.

"I have given you up, Bennie, to your grandfather because he needs you more and can give you more than I can. Will you be good to him, darling?"

"Yes, Mamma," tearfully; "but if you love me why do you leave me?"

"My little son," she faltered, taking his face between her hands and kissing it while her sobs shook her, "my little son, there may come a time when people will tell you that your mother did not love you, when they may speak against her to you; but you and I know better, dear. Promise me that you will always remember that!"

"Yes, Mamma, I promise."

"And you will remember, Bennie, that I always put you first and thought of you and tried to do what was best for you and not for me?"

"Yes, Mamma, I know you always do."

"And, Bennie, there is no stain on my good name; you can be proud of it. And for your father, he has left us, and when you learn why you must forgive him and pray God not to let you become like him."

"Yes, Mamma; I had far rather be like you. You know he kicked Toodles."

"Bennie, my lamb, put your arms about me now, and tell me you will always love me and make me proud of you, and come back to me when you can."

"Indeed I will, Mamma, I am your own little boy and I shall do you proud yet."

"Honest Indjun, Bennie?"

"Honest Indjun, Mamma."

She pressed him to her convulsively, and he kissed and stroked her cheek, saying with another wail, "I wish you were not going away." But he did not understand that it was good-bye, and she saw that he did not, and after a moment she got up, and kissing him again wiped his eyes and sent him to play with his little dog.

The house was very still as she crept back to her room, and sitting down at her desk she wrote two letters. The first one to Mr. Sherwood read:

"I am going away now to avoid the parting with Bennie and because I cannot bear any more. Do not worry over me. I have money enough of my own for my needs. I send the child to you as I promised. Try to make him happy.

"ISABEL."

The other one was to Walter and was a little longer.

"I am going away," it read. "I have given Bennie up to Mr. Sherwood, and I could not bear my life here without him. Do not try to follow me now. I wish to be alone to recover from the shock of it all. If in a year's time you feel towards me as you did, seek me at your old home in Devon. I shall be there.

"Ever your
"ISABEL."

Later in the morning she sent for Bennie's nurse.

"Early to-morrow morning," she said, "take the boy to his grandfather with this letter. And good-night," she added, holding out her hand.

"Good-night, Mrs. Sherwood," said the other looking at her sadly and curiously.

Isabel hurriedly put on her things, and when dressed she slipped for a moment into Bennie's room. He was sleeping quietly with Toodles clasped in his arms, and the tears were only partly dried upon his cheeks; but a smile lingered about his lips.

"He is like his father in not suffering very long," she murmured, as she stooped and kissed him. He stirred a little uneasily, but he did not wake, and she crept away again silently and called her maid.

"Now quick, ring for a carriage and get this luggage on to it while the others are downstairs. We have no time to lose!"

And so quietly, stealthily, almost like a criminal, she left the house which she had entered as a bride and where she had spent such years of happiness and misery, and while driving through the deserted

streets she kept repeating to herself these words from the burial service:

"We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out."

Yes, she had lost all at one blow; money, social position, friends, husband and child, and everything she had ever valued. Nothing remained to her of it all but the love of one man, and would he too fail her at the last? At that moment she almost believed that he would, as she looked out into the night.

The next morning two men started out to seek each other, each moved by the same impulse, due to a letter from Isabel. They met in front of Mr. Sherwood's house, and read in each other's faces that each sought the same thing. Mr. Sherwood spoke first.

"I do not know where she has gone," he said. "I only wish I did. She has written me nothing definite."

"Nor me," gasped Walter. "I hoped she had to you."

Mr. Sherwood turned to re-enter the house, and as he did so he leaned a little feebly on Walter's arm.

"I am sorry she has done this," he said with a note of regret. "I never meant to drive her to it, but I made her give Bennie up to me. I was right!" straightening himself up again. "You agree with me, do you not, that it was the best thing for her to do?" anxiously seeking his eye.

For a moment Walter turned away; for a moment his eyes, once so closed to all such visions, gained a

clearer insight to the cost at which Mr. Sherwood had obtained his wishes; the next, his practical sense predominating, he answered:

"Yes, I suppose you are right, and it was best for every one in the end; but—how she must suffer!"

"That will pass," he answered quite in his own voice, as if relieved of a burden by this approval, and they went in together.

The three Sherwood sisters were in the drawing-room discussing, as when he first met them, Bennie and his mother.

"I always thought," Catherine was saying, "that she had very little real mother-love in her heart. A woman cannot who does not give her baby his bath."

"What can you expect from a woman who smokes and is so fond of attention?" Elizabeth answered austere.

"Nonsense!" contradicted Margaret. "But I must confess I always told Henry she would give Bennie up if anything were to happen to Jack. However, people differ, and we should not judge them," she added with a saving recollection.

"If you are speaking of Isabel," said her father's cold voice as he and Walter suddenly appeared at the door, "you cannot judge her too favourably," and Walter's face echoed his words, while Elizabeth whispered to her sister:

"What fools men always are about a woman like that!"

And they went upstairs, while Mr. Sherwood took Walter to his study to discuss the railroad.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"The world goes up and the world goes down,
And the sunshine follows the rain;
And yesterday's sneer and yesterday's frown
Can never come over again,
Sweet wife,
No never come over again.

For woman is warm though men be cold,
And the night will hallow the day,
Till the heart which at even was weary and old
Can rise in the morning gay,
Sweet wife,
To its work in the morning gay."

KINGSLEY.

SPRING and summer came and went, and it was autumn now in Walter's birthplace, the little parish of Combe St. Thomas in Devon.

Again, as at the time of his first meeting with Isabel, the yellow autumn haze mellowed the air, completing the perfect beauty of the scene, in this little church yard, hidden from the world and wasting its sweetness on the graves beneath. Away in the distance stretched a thin line of blue telling of the sea beyond, and between lay the downs, green and luxuriant, through which the road, between its tall hawthorn hedges, wound like a silver serpent, past the church yard to the heights above. A cloud of white dust hung over the hedges and covered the ivy

leaves clustering about the lych gate, while above the little church towered bravely the dull grey of its colouring relieved against a green background of yews.

Was it the hand of time, or of nature or of man, which gave it that divine touch of beauty, belonging to every great work of art, where each detail works harmoniously together to the formation of one perfect whole?

This question was in Isabel's mind as she opened the gate of what seemed at once a garden and a graveyard. Roses hung above her head and their perfume followed her to the church door; the mellow tone of a bell floated out to her, and as she glanced back to the road she had left she could see a flock of sheep winding their way, from their pasturage on the downs, to their home on the heights above.

"Beautiful Devon! how could our people ever bear to leave you—even for New England!" she murmured, as she entered the church door, and as she did so the bell ceased tolling and for a moment all was still.

Then the gate below her clicked suddenly and steps sounded along the tiled path, and somebody was entering the church behind her and a man's footsteps were following her up the aisle to the door of the old Coffin pew. And as she entered and seated herself she turned and looked inquiringly at the intruder, while a gleam of sunlight, shining through the stained glass window, fell upon her head—it was Walter.

For one moment the church, with its marble pillars, its tombs of knightly Coffins dead and gone, in all the glory of their many quarterings; all played strange antics together in Isabel's brain. The next the service had begun and she was handing him the prayer book in her hand, saying merely: "Welcome home!"

It was what Walter's heart had been saying to him all along as he walked there through the well remembered scenes; it was this which spoke to him in the voices of the choir, and in the words of the prayers and hymns; and it seemed even to form in a halo about Isabel's fair head, as she handed him the book in which his father's name had been written long ago. Yes, this was home, and if heaven was more beautiful, which he doubted, at least there was no angel there to compare, in his eyes, with her as she looked to him that day.

"I walked," Isabel said with a faint smile, as the service ended and they left the church, "for I live very near," and as he did not answer she silently led the way.

It was but a step to the cottage where she had made her home, and from which she could see both the church and the old manor house where Walter used to live. It was a quaint old cottage, thickly covered with yellow roses, and in its garden great fuchsias and heliotrope were still in bloom. They crossed it, still silently, and entered the living room opening upon it, while Isabel, as if hardly able to breathe, took off her hat and walking to the window flung it open.

"Isabel," he whispered brokenly.

"Ah!" she cried, "so you have come back to me. I did not suppose that you would." And he caught her in his arms. . . .

But after a time she drew away again and held him at arm's length, exclaiming:

"You are not playing fair, for the year has not yet passed!"

"What does that matter, now that you belong to me," he answered blissfully, drawing her down upon the window seat beside him, while the soft damp air from the sea floated in upon them, as she asked:

"How did you know that I was here?"

"I did not know, I only felt that you must be and I came as soon as I could. Why should you wish to keep me waiting?"

She looked up with the old furtive smile upon her lips.

"I had to gain first what I came here to seek."

"And that is?" pressing her to him.

"Resignation! You suggested it when you told me to let nature teach me as she had taught my father. When I came here I was too humiliated to appreciate the truth; now I do."

"What truth, darling?"

"That if we make our own good name, no one outside ourselves can rob us of it. So you see I still have my jewel, Walter," and she lifted her face and kissed him.

It was only later that he said to her: "Isabel, I have seen Bennie very often," and he saw her shrink and shiver in his arms.

"Yes, I know. He has written me and my lawyer forwards the letters. He is happy?"

"Yes, I think so; but he has not forgotten his mother."

She half shook her head, smiling a little bitterly, as she asked: "And Mr. Sherwood?"

"He looks like an old man; but Bennie is everything to him."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "as he was to me."

"Isabel!" he answered almost fiercely, "tell me that I can take his place! You are my treasure and if I thought that Bennie or any one could come before me, I should never be able to bear it."

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Sherwood was right," then with a sudden change of tone as she stroked his cheek, "I know that you are the only one, Walter, who can ever make me forget," and his face cleared as he pressed her in his arms.

"And now," she said as she lifted her head from his shoulder, "tell me one thing more before the subject is closed—Jack, what has become of him, has he married her?"

He nodded silently.

"Oh!" she said as though in deep thought.

"I hear from my mother that they are in Paris and that Jeannie has given up her painting again and seems happy—so far."

"She may hold him for a time," she answered quietly. "You see I should feel more sympathy for her, but for one thing which Jack told me—she knew, almost from the first."

"About you?"

"That he was married already, yes. Just before he left her, he found a letter in her desk, which she had intercepted. It was from me and was dated soon after their arrival in Paris."

"It seems incredible!" he gasped.

"Does it not? But in this one case at least I have no reason to doubt Jack's word. However, she may get along none the worse with him on that account; for she will understand him."

He made a movement of disgust.

"And your cousin?" she inquired softly.

"Arthur is still fighting injustice, poor fellow, and is still the victim of it. He will never recover from the wound he received; it hurt him far more than he was able to hurt the Sherwoods."

"I, too, have suffered injustice," she answered, "and since I have been here I have thought a great deal about it. There is no use in fighting it, Walter, for it is our lot; but with sympathy, we are less likely to inflict it on others. And between ourselves let us at least struggle for perfect understanding."

"How can we fail to have that, if we love each other?" he asked in true masculine fashion.

And she smiled, though she shook her head.

THE END

MAR 3 1960

Handwritten signature or initials, possibly "J. E.", next to a dark vertical mark.

Handwritten mark, possibly a checkmark or a stylized letter.

Handwritten horizontal line or bracket.

